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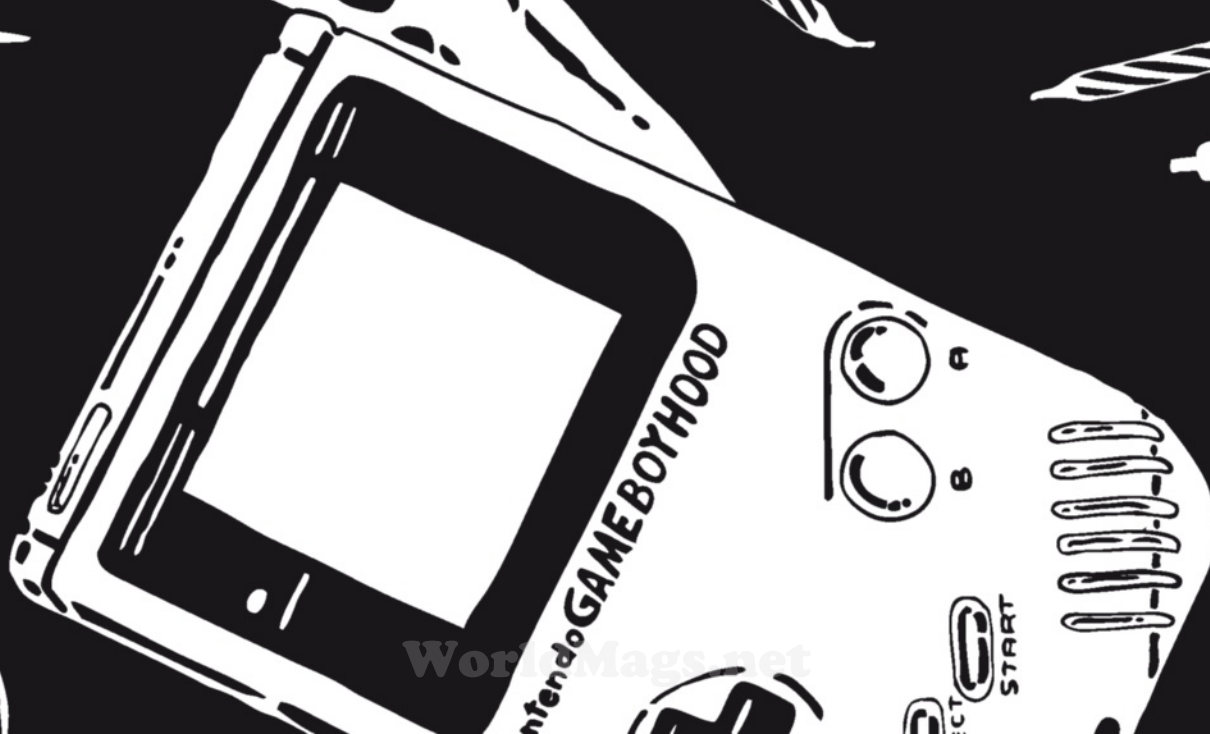


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Boyhood

Directed by **RICHARD LINKLATER**
 Starring **ELLAR COLTRANE, PATRICIA ARQUETTE, ETHAN HAWKE**
 Released **11 JULY**

UNWITTING PRE-TEEN MOVIE ACTOR ELLAR COLTRANE GROWS UP IN PUBLIC AS THE CENTRAL, GLORIOUS SPECTACLE OF RICHARD LINKLATER'S LATEST, ARGUABLY THE FINAL WORD ON THE MALE RITE-OF-PASSAGE SAGA.

REVIEW

Nearly half of Richard Linklater's 17 features have been shot primarily in Texas, from the faux-groggy minimalist road trip of 1988's *It's Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books* to 2011's *Bernie*, a micro-specific portrait of small-town east Texas contextualised by an illustrated lecture on "the five states" within the state.

Linklater hasn't released a movie shot in his adopted home base of Austin since 2004, where the to-be-Rotoscoped source footage for *A Scanner Darkly* was filmed. *Boyhood*, in that sense, marks a very personal homecoming. Production on the film took place between 2002 to 2013, beginning just as Linklater went mainstream (to everyone's satisfaction) with *School of Rock*, before continuing on through the most professionally frustrating period of his career.

2005's *Bad News Bears* remake effectively terminated his Hollywood sojourn; a patch of lukewarmly received follow-ups culminated in 2008's *Me and Orson Welles*, which took a formerly improbable year-plus to get an American release, Zac Efron affiliation and all. Even a presumably sure thing like a proposed "spiritual sequel" to *Dazed and Confused* (same vibe relocated to a 1981 college campus during the first week of the fall semester) couldn't attract financing. Returning more-or-less annually to *Boyhood* ensured continuous directorial practice, a chance to refine technique despite an unjustly rough second act.

Urban centre Houston, state capital Austin, the unprepossessing college town of San Marcos and rite-of-passage site Big Bend National Park are

the main locations for the growth of Mason (Ellar Coltrane), an initially unexceptional suburban moppet turned glowingly-tanned college freshman. 35mm was chosen to ensure technical continuity over the 12-year arc, and the ever-so-slightly heightened colours and a saturated gloss confirm it. The uninterrupted visual continuity mirrors Mason's readiness to intuitively understand and inherit the world he grows into.



Linklater's past attempts at heavy drama have generally been deadly (two mediocre play adaptations in 1996's *SubUrbia* and 2001's *Tape*, plus the Shirley MacLaine sequences in *Bernie*), shot with the pained resolve of someone who would rather be filming anything else. Watch deleted scenes from *Dazed and Confused* and you'll find a wisely excised argument about the Vietnam War; period-appropriate window dressing becomes shouty text in a sequence that's both unnecessarily literal and (unavoidable pun unintended) a total buzzkill.

Boyhood also marks the first film since *A Scanner Darkly* in which Linklater has tackled a semi-conventional narrative. It's a story fraught with potentially histrionic passages, and Linklater comes out a winner. The first hour pits Mason and mum, Olivia (Patricia Arquette), against new stepdad Bill (Marco Perella), gradually revealed as an uber-macho, psychologically abusive drunk. Bill's biggest offence isn't his gradual edging towards physical violence, but in forcing Mason to shave his locks ("now you won't look like a girl"). This is the section of the film



REVIEW



“The uninterrupted visual continuity mirrors Mason’s readiness to intuitively understand and inherit the world he grows into.”

that has raised the most criticism, but Linklater has never been more successful at subtly embedding potentially heavy drama.

There’s a solidly pragmatic reason for this dramatic strategy — Coltrane was simply too young to carry an entire hour’s worth of screen time, and the grown-up drama gives him some cover. It’s also a vital psychological part of his upbringing, instilling a lifelong aversion to all forms of self-righteous babble about how to “be a man”. For his 16th birthday, Mason must spend time with family members who give him his very first firearm and Bible: God-and-guns rural libertarian piety in a nutshell. Mason says thank you nicely and seems genuinely curious about learning to fire the rifle, picking and choosing exactly which parts of his state’s heritage are worth making his own. Part of *Boyhood’s* design is to be as grandly expansive as its title, but it’s also grounded by the localised specifics of growing up in a state where hold-your-tongue tolerance is a necessity.

Often dismissively pegged as a “modest” filmmaker, Linklater hasn’t proven as congenitally allergic to overt technical ambition or shouted confrontations as his amiable image might attest. By virtue of premise and attendant scale (the ability to leap a decade of memory in under three hours, just long enough to trigger flashbacks when a location recurs), *Boyhood* places Linklater’s deft control into sharper relief more frequently than usual. His comparatively rare signature show-off shot is a slowly maintained walk-and-talk, pulling backwards from two people as they amble forward, their lazy stride eliminating the need for camera stress. There’s a lengthy doozy in a San Marcos back alley: a sunny stroll between Mason and a girl never seen before or after, ambient weather pleasure given the same weight as the mild, admirably obdurate drama of Mason’s ingrained aversion to any form of authority.

Linklater is not unaware of Big Drama; he consciously pares away all but the most glancing moments of pain. Sustained passages with no meaningful outside forces shape the action — non-productive pockets of time, free from the demands of work or stultifying company — and allow people to stretch out into their most interesting dimensions, conducting bemused interrogations of others or ranting about a personal interest. Mason combines both archetypal Linklater characters, alternately a seemingly passive listener and the one who holds court — his prophetic

anti-smartphone speech is a natural to be snipped out of context and passed around the internet. His growth requires him to figure out which mode is appropriate for his current audience (and whether he cares).

Unsentimental compression accelerates time’s passing every 20 minutes. Mason’s voice changes and his skin increasingly glows, his physical evolution just one of the regular temporal markers. Sister Samantha (Lorelei Linklater, the director’s daughter) is equally fascinating, glimpsed in fondly exasperated co-existence; semi-present biological dad Ethan Hawke is his usual Dorian Gray self and single mum Patricia Arquette can barely keep up with them all. “This is the worst day of my life,” she cries when Mason leaves for college: the first time tears have cropped up and the first instance of heavy drama since Bill’s exit, more effective for its unexpected intrusion. All this time she’s been working, paying bills, navigating a series of unsatisfactory partners and trying not to snap at her kids. Meanwhile, her son grew up largely out of sight, a sharp, sudden realisation.

Movies are uniquely suited for intensely registering seemingly non-transformative moments which assume nostalgic gravity when revisited years later. The low-key default humorousness of Linklater’s work and the babbling plurality of voices — not, admittedly, all equally compelling — has given way to a tightly plotted upbringing that is predictably devoid of real threat, the better to concentrate without worry on time’s passage.

No important characters die, and after stepdad Bill exits the picture, it’s delightfully smooth sailing. In the non-finale’s sweet concession to broad comedy, Mason arrives at college, gets baked and heads back to Big Bend, reclaiming the site of father-son vacations as a starting space for college partying with his new roommate and starter friends: life goes vacantly and pleasantly on. Most locations in the film are visited casually, and only once. Returning to Big Bend years later is a rare moment of stability.

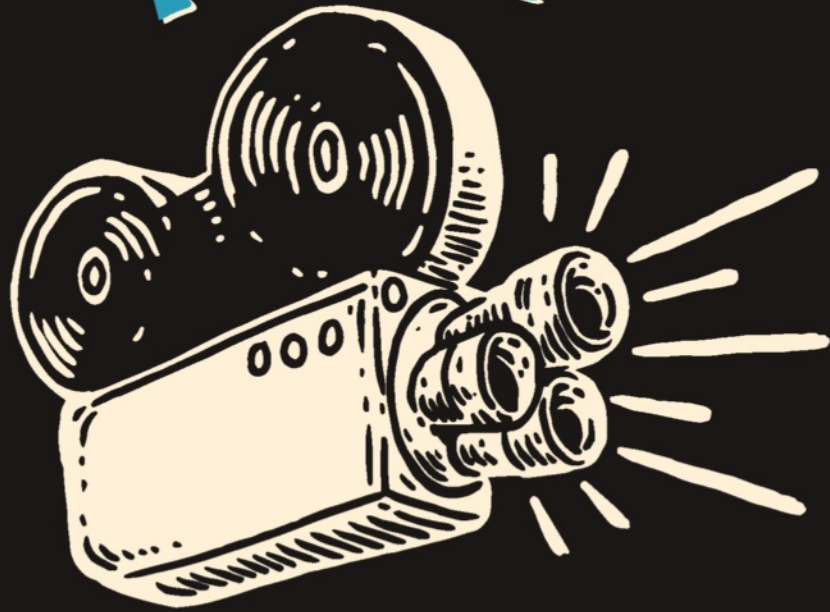


It may be even more fun to watch *Boyhood* a few decades hence just to see how the period markers have aged: whether the soundtrack choices (songs chosen for their popularity, not a curatorial taste indicator) have persevered as radio standards or faded away, whether the inherent datedness of all fashions has become visible yet. For now, it simultaneously functions as a coming-of-age comedy, mother-son drama and nuanced cross-section of Texas life as the state shifts from red to blue, maintaining urgency and a steady stream of performance surprises (and punchlines). Its cumulative impact, triggered by Olivia’s brief freak-out and Mason’s necessarily tough-minded/callous moving on with his inconsequential life, is an embedded shard whose sadness cuts deep. **VADIM RIZOV**

ANTICIPATION. <i>A Richard Linklater passion project which has long been bubbling in the backdrop.</i>	4
ENJOYMENT. <i>Wistful, nostalgic and judged to perfection.</i>	5
IN RETROSPECT. <i>Could reveal itself as Linklater’s defining cinematic statement. One we’ll be watching 12 years down the line.</i>	5

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COLOSSAL YOUTH

Over the past 20 years, Richard Linklater has evolved into one of America's most bold and exciting filmmakers, but remains totally humble with it. LWLies met him in his hometown of Austin, TX.

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HIGH SOCIETY

Richard Linklater was instrumental in the creation and evolution of the Austin Film Society. LWLies speaks to one of its head patrons, Chale Nafus, and offers a short history of world film societies.

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THE MEN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERAS

This is the story behind Double Play, Gabe Klinger's documentary which examines and compares the life and work of Richard Linklater with that of famed experimental filmmaker, James Benning.

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As one of Austin's favourite sons, Richard Linklater has made it his business to place his adopted hometown on the movie map. LWLies investigates how he captures this laid-back city on film.

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In the spirit of his legendary 1991 debut, Slacker, LWLies charts the movie projects that almost (but didn't quite) make it into the Linklater canon.

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IN BLOOM

A graphic novel adventure into the land of Linklater.

GOLO





!youth.

WORDS BY ADAM WOODWARD
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIMBA SMITS

LWLIES TRAVELLED ACROSS THE GLOBE TO MEET AUSTIN'S FAVORITE SON ON HIS HOME TURF. HE TELLS US ABOUT THE TWELVE YEAR JOURNEY THAT CULMINATED IN HIS MASTERPIECE, *BOYHOOD*.

- ALL HAIL CENTRAL TEXAS -

Standing in line to see Richard Linklater's seventeenth film, *Boyhood*, at South By Southwest festival in the director's adopted hometown of Austin, Texas, a complete stranger offsets the unseasonably cold weather by striking up a conversation. It turns out the man, a native Austinite, worked as an extra on *Boyhood*, and on top of that, he attended the middle school in which Linklater filmed several key scenes. The same school played a starring role in the writer/director's third feature, *Dazed and Confused*, 20 years ago.

Talk to folk around town about Richard Linklater and chances are they'll have a kind word to offer or an anecdote to share. Though originally hailing from Houston, Linklater is regarded as one of Austin's own – his work with the Austin Film Society, which he co-founded in 1985, has been a major factor in the city's post-Millennial cultural and economic boom. Unsurprisingly, the good will is mutual. "Austin is the place I escaped to," explains Linklater. "I came here as a high school kid, I had a lot of friends here and it's where I first started seeing live music. It felt like a place of freedom and creativity. There were all these people in bands and a lot of artists. Where I came from, I didn't think I needed to go to LA or New York, *this* was the big league." What made him stick around? "I guess I just like the way folks' brains work around here."

Linklater first came to Austin in 1984, and as anyone who's lived here that long will tell you, the city has changed a lot since then. "Back then you could have bought downtown for a nickel," he jokes. "It was completely burned out and boarded up. I can point to locations where these huge buildings are now and say, 'that used to be a warehouse', or 'we used to go and watch bands there.'" Despite the glint of nostalgia in his eye, Linklater stresses that he sheds no tears for the good old bad old days. "I kind of like the new Austin. Back then there was nothing going on. There are more opportunities now for people to stay here and express themselves and make a living."

- THE JOCK TRAJECTORY -

He may be the uncrowned king of American indie cinema, but directing wasn't an obvious career choice for a young Linklater. "I was on sports teams," he recalls, "so my youth was very different to how a lot of people might imagine." Linklater grew up playing football, but went on to earn a scholarship at Sam Houston State to concentrate on his first love, baseball. Though injury forced him to surrender his dream of making it to the Major Leagues, he still enjoys stepping up to the plate in his spare time, and even occasionally trains with the University of Texas Longhorns' team – he once described hitting a baseball as "maybe the best thing about life."

Looking back at *Dazed and Confused*, it's strange to think that Linklater ostensibly had more in common growing up with Ben Affleck's paddle-wielding jock than any of the film's lovable misfits. He wasn't an alpha male or a bully by any stretch, but his tacit connection with that world undoubtedly added to the film's authenticity. "The truth is, that stuff actually went on in my school," smiles Linklater. "All the seemingly barbaric rituals and traditions that are in the film, it's all stuff that really happened."

While Linklater was initially more interested in sports than cinema, he acknowledges that he has always been a passionate writer. "I was the kid in fifth grade whose short story would end up getting read to the principal," he says with a lingering sense of pride. It was around this time that Linklater relocated from Houston to the smaller blue-collar community of Huntsville with his mother, a move that inspired his deep-seated fascination with the contrasting minutiae of city and small town life. Add to the mix the fact that he didn't cross the state line until he was 20, and you start to get a clearer picture of the parochial worldview that would inform both *Slacker* and *Dazed*. Linklater remembers growing up in awe of the sheer scale of America's largest mainland State. "We'd take these long five-hour drives without ever leaving Texas", he says. "I felt like I'd been everywhere, seen everything there was to see. But despite how big Texas is, I always had this feeling of being trapped."

- COMMERCIAL BREAK -

Even in the early days, Linklater was clear in his mind about what it meant to be an independent filmmaker. Despite yearning for his voice to be heard, he was equally wary of playing into Hollywood's hands. Following 1991's *Slacker*, made for a paltry \$23,000, Universal gave Linklater \$6m to make *Dazed*, which is what he needed "to do that film right". Although a significantly greater budget was required to secure the rights to the songs that would appear on the film's iconic soundtrack, Linklater claims that he never came close to making a bargain with the devil. The studio system is a different beast today, and Linklater continues to keep his distance. "I avoid the industry as much as possible," he says. "The focus on business you get in Los Angeles is just so depressing; everyone's focused on the commerce end."

While Linklater's anti-establishment mindset is admirable, has he ever been tempted to work as a gun-for-hire in order to fund his next project? "Never," he insists. "I think anyone who's on the path to be a gun-for-hire probably deserves to be. They probably don't have a burning passion or enough of their own stories." He continues, "I've turned down so much money, but my best films always came from turning down a lot of money." Bottom line: "I never did anything to get somewhere else. I always just dug in my heels and did what I wanted to do next. That gets harder and harder, but I've never approached my work as a means to an end."

That, in a nutshell, is the key to Linklater's longevity. But there's more to it than that. His keen survival instinct aside, Linklater has always been good at making the most of limited resources. Even his most commercially successful movie to date, 2003's



School of Rock, was a relatively modest studio comedy. Linklater goes one further. "No one thought it was going to be a hit. It was just me and Jack [Black], goofing around. And you have to remember, Jack wasn't really a big star yet, so it was far from a sure thing. Nowadays, if you have a movie that does well at Sundance it's like, 'Well, you can do that again, or you can come do this \$100m vampire movie'. I meet filmmakers who are hot right now and I just think, 'Go make your next film'. Just do it, don't sit in LA developing it for four years because it'll just drain you. They don't even really pay you properly while you're developing a film. Work with your hands, that's my advice."

- AN IMPRACTICAL IDEA -

For all the notches in his belt, for every wild experiment and unlikely triumph, it says a lot about both Linklater's dedication to his craft and his desire to push himself creatively that he's never lost his ability to surprise. In 2006 Linklater became the first director to have two films screen at the Cannes Film Festival in the same year – the distinctly subversive *Fast Food Nation* and the Rotoscoped Phillip K Dick adaptation, *A Scanner Darkly*. *Boyhood* tops that feat.

Conceived in early 2001 while Linklater was contemplating making a film about childhood but having trouble singling out a period he felt was worth exploring, *Boyhood* started life, like most of Linklater's films, as an "impractical idea". From the moment the seed of that initial thought took root, however, he was determined to see it through. What quickly became known as 'The 12 Year Project' gathered steam when Ethan Hawke and Patricia Arquette enthusiastically signed on, and Linklater's next challenge was to secure the required funding – a stumbling block that arrived with an unanticipated twist. "IFC Films gave us some money to get things going, but at one stage they wanted to turn the project into a series. That was never an option for me."

Linklater knows how the game works. He accepts that no one wants to write a cheque they know they won't be able to cash for 13 years. And yet it's precisely because *Boyhood* seemed like such an unrealistic prospect, not in spite of the fact that so many people – from film stars to financiers – committed to it long-term. You get the sense that Linklater intrigues the people he works with as much as he inspires them. From his description of the film's production as feeling like "a summer camp art project", you start to understand what it is that people love about working with Linklater.

As an unconventional venture that required an immense group effort, it was important for Linklater to ensure that everyone

kept the faith, even though he admits quietly thinking, "it was an abstract notion that anyone would ever see what we were doing. I was convinced no one would ever see it." So Linklater worked out his logistics, sketching out the architecture of the story, giving IFC an outline and telling the team his plan: each year they would reassemble, shoot a few scenes and edit what they had. "The momentum built over the years", Linklater reflects. "You could feel the investment grow."

So, you've got your leads, mobilised a crew and found a backer. What's next? Just the small matter of finding the boy whose story you're going to tell – what Ethan Hawke equated to "time lapse photography of a human being". Casting a child with a view to how they might develop both physically and socially during their formative years may sound like a daunting task. But Linklater had a nifty solution: "I was secretly casting the parents," he reveals. "Ellar had cool parents; both artists who both had strong Austin/Texas ties, which was important because as an ongoing collaboration I needed a certain amount of access. I very much needed them to see it as an artistic project that would have a positive affect on their son's life, and not become a negative burden. And they got that from the outset."

- OUTSIDE THE BOX -

From presidential elections to global conflicts to *Star Wars* sequels and *Harry Potter*, *Boyhood* also serves as a time capsule of 21st century America. But if any of these cultural snapshots feel contrived or self-conscious, Linklater insists that they're purely coincidental. In fact, while critics and academics have long heralded Linklater as a cultural anthropologist, he rejects the idea of being a mouthpiece of a generation. "It's a ridiculous notion", he asserts. "The notion of Gen X is so abstract; it's always tied to these arbitrary dates. That kind of thinking really doesn't appeal to me. It's so reductive. I've never consciously positioned myself to be that guy."

The interesting thing about *Slacker* and Douglas Coupland's 1991 novel, which helped popularise the phrase 'Generation X', is that both were observing a lifestyle that was hard to define in its day. Linklater never intended to capture the Zeitgeist; he simply wanted to make realistic films that people could relate to. Still, he accepts that maintaining a certain stylistic and thematic rhythm lends itself to people attaching labels. "That's what we do as a species," he says. "We create boxes."

To some, Linklater might be the indie godhead who spawned the Slacker generation, but to others he's the Rotoscoping pioneer of *Waking Life*, the man behind raucous mainstream comedies

like *School of Rock* and *Bad News Bears*, or the visionary director who brought us the *Before* films. Yet aside from that latter trilogy, each part of which was released in nine-year intervals, Linklater claims to have never followed a specific career path. Apparently, he's made a habit of getting lucky. "Every film I've made has been the result of different circumstances coming together at the right time." He continues, adding that he's had it far from all his own way. "Some projects take a little longer to happen, I'd been trying to make *Bernie* for 10 years. When you're the kind of filmmaker I am, you find yourself living moment to moment."

On a technical level, the tonal and aesthetic consistency achieved on *Boyhood* is astonishing. But it shouldn't really come as a surprise. Linklater may relish hopscotching between genre, period and place, but whether he's directing a spunky live-action comedy, a trippy animated thriller, or an enchanting romantic saunter, his films all feel like part of the same big family. So what's his secret? "I honestly don't think I've changed as a filmmaker over the last 18 years", says Linklater with just a hint of self-deprecation. "I'm always trying to push myself, but I feel confident in my ability to be consistent with a project over a number of years."

- AFTER MIDNIGHT -

So where does Richard Linklater go from here? How do you top a project as ambitious in scope and execution as *Boyhood*? To answer those questions, you have to regard *Boyhood* as a major career milestone, and that's simply not how Linklater sees it. Each of his "big family lifetime projects" may feel like notable bookmarks in his 26-year career, but to Linklater each new project simply represents the next thing. So, to rephrase the initial question, what's next for Richard Linklater? "I've got a tonne of scripts that will probably never see the light of day", he confesses, "but actually the next film I'm trying to make is a big family comedy. If that comes off it'll be so different, a complete palette cleanser."

With that project still in the early development stage, Linklater is understandably staying tight-lipped. He can reveal, however, that he's also lining up his spiritual sequel to *Dazed*, which he describes to *LVLies* as "a college version of *The Wolf of Wall Street*". Even more exciting, however, is the mooted return of Celine and Jesse. "Another *Before* film? Who knows?" Linklater teases. "There's nothing to say we won't be back in another eight years. I could keep making the *Before* films, but, you know, I've got different stories to tell. I've been lucky to be able to follow whatever story I've been compelled to tell, and that's how I think I'll see it out." 🎬





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HIGH Society

SCHOLAR AND PROGRAMMER CHALE NAFUS TAUGHT FILM TO RICHARD LINKLATER BEFORE JOINING HIM IN MAINTAINING THE WORLD-FAMOUS AUSTIN FILM SOCIETY. LWLIES HEARS HIS STORY.

ILLUSTRATION BY **LUKE BROOKES**
AS TOLD TO **DAVID JENKINS**

We started the Austin Film Society in 1985. Richard Linklater and two of his friends, Brecht Andersch and Lee Daniel, the three of them created the film society so they had an excuse to order 16mm prints. They realised, of course, that there were probably some other people in Austin who would like to see them too. I used to work in the Radio, Television and Film department at the Austin Community College. Rick had been my student during the previous year of 1984. And he took Film History and Film Appreciation. He wrote wonderful papers. He was particularly interested in Bresson and Ozu at the time. He went on to work on oil rigs after high school and he'd take VHS tapes of these foreign classics with him. He'd read lots of film books too. I always tell people that I taught him nothing.

He didn't talk very much. His ideas came out through his writing. When he started this film society, we had screening rooms at the community college. I remember one of our first ones was a series of Sam Fuller movies. And films from Cuba. A focus on Eastern Europe. Rick then leased a place over the road from the college, which eventually became the home of the Austin Film Society. It was called the Dobie Hall, which was a housing unit for students and it had two screens inside it. I guess he was there for about ten years. We didn't really pay much, and there was a little bit of income to cover costs. But his basic idea was that movies should be free. He did ask me to be on the board of the film society, but that was just a formality. I don't think we had our first meeting until 10 years later. By 1990, he was starting work on *Slacker*, so more of his energy was going towards production. An amazing group of people came through those doors to see films and talk about them. Devoted cinema lovers.

We did a lot of avant garde and experimental series and those were quite revelatory. I did not have an appreciation for Bresson until Rick introduced me to his work. The space was pretty small, so the regular crowd was of about 30 or 40 people. A core group. The Society is run by

a board now. Rebecca Campbell is our executive director. They finally got offices in a house that Rick had leased. Now we're based in an old airport. We have 20 acres, seven airplane hangers, two of which are now full sound stages.

I truly wish 35mm still ruled the kingdom of cinema, but the digital revolution has triumphed. A programmer can select titles from the diminishing storehouse of celluloid held by private collectors and the few archives who will let a film leave the vaults. Or, in my case, I decide what "films" I want to show in a particular series and then seek out the best version available – beginning with 35mm. If that is not available in the US, then a DCP is welcome. Barring availability of those formats, BluRay is acceptable. Worst-case scenario would be DVD, but if that is the only way to have a particular title in a series, then I will go that route. Fortunately our digital projection equipment in the 275-seat theatre handles even DVDs quite well. I was a purist about 35mm when it wasn't suicidal, but now I have to live with the digital reality, while maintaining standards.

I guess the first big change for the Society was when Tarantino got involved. This was the time when he was known as 'Quentin' rather than 'Tarantino'. He came to us with *Pulp Fiction* in 1994 and we did a regional premiere. Tarantino loved *Dazed and Confused*, so he and Rick became good friends. Quentin started to come to Austin more and more on his downtime. He was collecting 35mm prints of Italian westerns and obscure Japanese horror pictures. He would come to Austin and do these movie marathons that would last usually about 10 days. We would call them QT Fest. The film society sponsored all of that.

That really just put the Austin Film Society on the map, I think. Around that time, more people were moving to Austin to make films. Soderbergh was someone else who became a big fan. The cool thing was that all these people were friends beforehand. I would not say that Rick is about glamour and celebrity at all. He tapped into something that was wanted and desired globally.

A SHORT HISTORY OF FILM SOCIETIES

Cinema 16

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

There was something of a shockwave that pulsed through the US film community in late April, 2012, when news emerged that Amos Vogel had died. Vogel was a dyed-in-the-wool cinephile who founded the Cinema 16 film society in 1947. Alongside his lauded 1974 tome, *'Film as a Subversive Art'* (a must-read for anyone studying cinema beyond the mainstream), he was largely responsible for the dissemination of some of the most radical and experimental works to be screened on the East coast of America ("Films You Cannot See Elsewhere," as the marketing tagline went), a tradition that was borne out of an early showing of Maya Deren's seminal surreal short, *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Cinema 16 came to an end in 1967.

Calcutta Film Society

CALCUTTA, INDIA

Co-founded by the godfather of Indian cinema, Satyajit Ray, in 1947, the purpose of the Calcutta Film Society was to take advantage of film prints that were travelling through the country due to the proliferation of American GIs at the time. But the plan wasn't merely to flog up the screens with glossy Hollywood escapism, but to juxtapose these "entertainments" with local films and foreign language classics. Though the society suffered a major diminution of its membership base by the 1980s (blamed on the pirate VHS boom), a collective yen to see films on celluloid has meant that the society gained momentum once more. Its first screening was of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*.

A Nos Amours

LONDON, ENGLAND

Named after a 1982 Maurice Pialat film (which was also the first film screened following their inception), A Nos Amours is a burgeoning London-based film society which is run by the film directors Joanna Hogg and Adam Roberts. Part of the central creed is to only screen films from prints, and this has led to technically tricky (albeit magnificent) screenings of

titles such as Fred Kelemen's 1997 film *Frost* and Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. Their current activities include screening the complete works of Belgian maestro Chantal Akerman and tracking down a 16mm print of Jacques Rivette's 12 hour metaphysical roundelay, *Out 1*.

Gothique Film Society

LONDON, ENGLAND

On the literature printed and distributed by the Gothique Film Society, one could always see a poorly-Xeroxed portrait of the late light entertainer and comedian Bob Monkhouse. He was one of the society's early boosters and, later, became its president, overseeing its programme of classic horror and fantasy cinema. Initially based in London School of Film Technique (now the London Film School) circa 1965, it moved to an auditorium in the top floor of Holborn Library in central London. The line-up consists of a Friday night double-bill at monthly intervals, and recent titles range from camp '50s schlock such as Edward L Cahn *Voodoo Woman* to chilling classics like Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* from 1931.

Whangarei Film Society

WHANGAREI, NEW ZEALAND

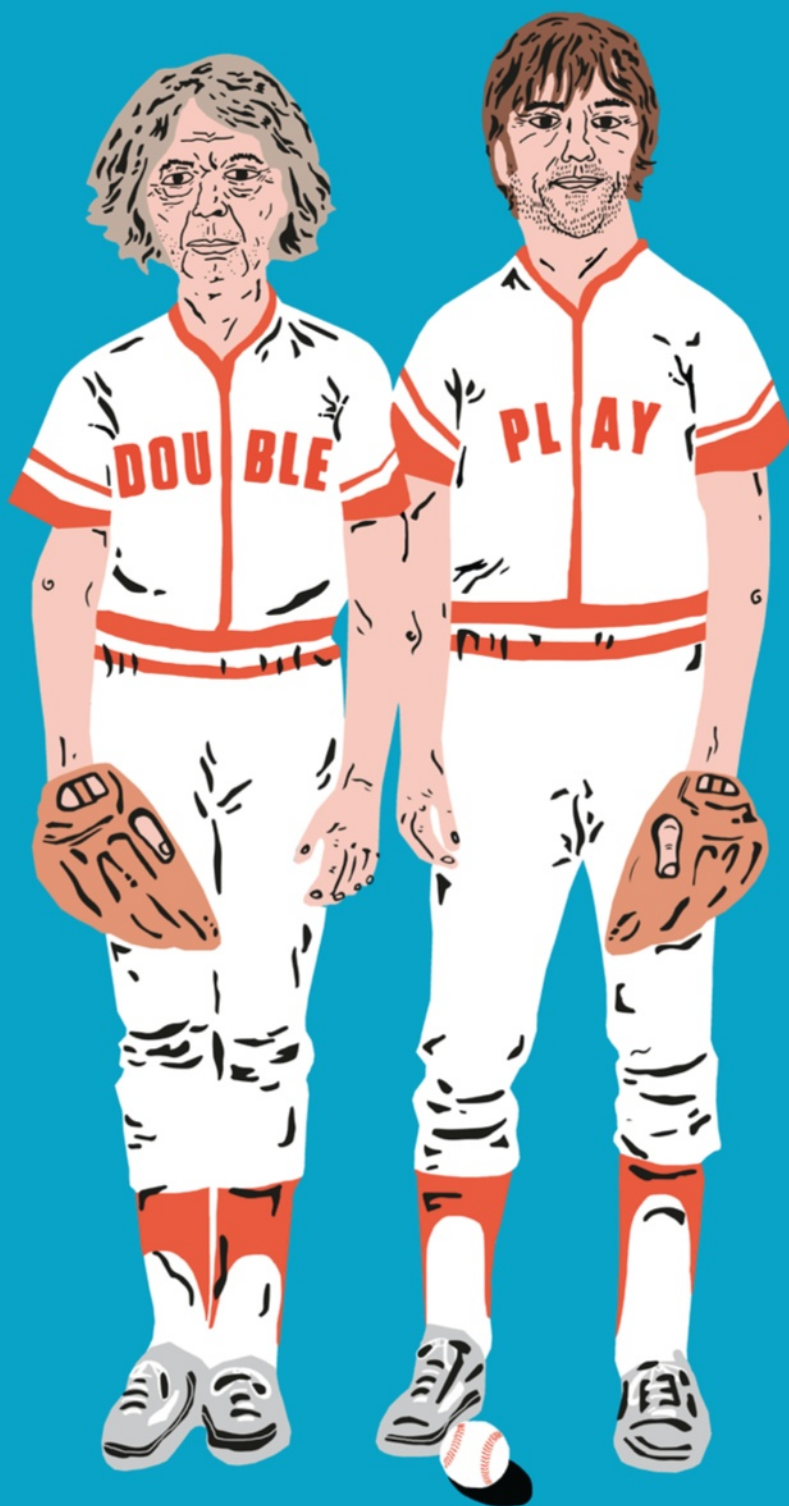
The northernmost city in New Zealand and cast in the shadow of the volcanic Mount Parihaka, Whangarei residents were given regular access to more esoteric film titles through the work of a film society which began in 2003. With one of its central aims to shore up the region's film culture and offer alternatives to blaring US imports, the society screens titles at the plush (and beautifully named) Capitaine Bougainville Theatre and its programme ranges from arthouse crowd-pleasers such as François Ozon's 2012 film, *In the House*, to local products such as *Gardening with the Soul*, a profile of 90-year-old landscaper and God-botherer, Sister Loyola Galvin.

Cine Falcatrú

ESPÍRITO SANTO, BRAZIL

In the early 2000s, some film societies were characterised less by the types of films they were screening and more by the formats on which those films were screened. A far cry from the 35mm puritanism of yore, neo-punk outfit Cine Falcatrú (translated as "Cinema Hoax") screened the all the latest movies freshly downloaded from early incarnations of peer-to-peer file-sharing networks, sometimes trumping the official releases by many months. This revolutionary affront to intellectual property laws spawned similar societies all over the world, most notably in Copenhagen, Berlin, Melbourne and Helsinki.





— AS TOLD TO DAVID JENKINS —

THE MEN ★ WITH THE ★ MOVIE CAMERAS

★★★ ILLUSTRATED BY OLIVER STAFFORD ★★★

IN THE SPIRIT OF HIS SUBJECTS, CRITIC AND FILMMAKER GABE KLINGER OPTED TO MAKE A CINEPHILE HANG-OUT MOVIE CHRONICLING THE INTELLECTUAL CAMARADERIE BETWEEN RICHARD LINKLATER THE EXPERIMENTAL PIONEER, JAMES BENNING. HERE, HE TELLS *LWLIES* ABOUT THE ALIGNING OF STARS THAT LED TO THE MAKING OF HIS FANTASTIC DOCUMENTARY, *DOUBLE PLAY*.

You could call *Double Play* a bromance. I was hanging out with Benning in Milwaukee at the end of 2012 and an old school chum of his, Jake Fuller showed me a video he made of Benning playing catch with Linklater. They'd taken a road trip around the States and stopped at Linklater's ranch in Bastrop, Texas, to hang out there for a few days. I asked James about it and he said that he and Rick had been friends for years. They have a lot of admiration for one another. Their affection isn't brotherly. Or even father-child. It's much more like colleagues who know and respect each other's work and enjoy each other's company. And they both like baseball. On the other hand, I'm a person who's very itinerant. I move from city to city, meet lots of people. I feel like the moments you spend connecting with people are so intense, and even if you don't see them that often, it still sits in the background in some way and influences your work and outlook on life.

LESSONS

James Benning lives about an hour outside of LA in a small place called Val Verde. It was a safehaven for middle class African Americans to go on vacation in the '50s. Like Palm Springs for black people. You go and see one of

his movies in the States, there are barely 30 people in the audience and they're all bewildered. There is more of an audience for his films in Austria and Germany. At a festival like the Vienne his films are frequently sold out. People stay for an hour afterwards and ask him questions. It's a great reference to have his films on DVD, but they really need to be seen in the cinema, preferably with James in person for contextualisation. He's such a great speaker, and that comes from years of teaching and thinking hard about his methods and why he's doing what he's doing.

He used to teach this legendary class at CalArts called Looking and Listening. He doesn't any more due to liability issues. American universities are very strict about these things. He would tell his students that the assignment was to meet at the top of a certain hill or mountain at sunrise. They'd have to find out when sunrise was and also the longitude and latitude of where they had to go. They were supposed to meet there, look at the sunrise without talking to one another or making notes. They just had to concentrate. After the "event", they would go back to class and describe what they saw and what they heard. That was it. The whole class. Every week, they'd do a different riff on that. So the next week they'd have to spend a Friday evening in the emergency room waiting area of a downtown hospital. His idea is that it takes an incredible amount of concentration to see and hear things. The way we're wired now, we're

constantly distracted. The class was about absorbing one's environment. Unless you're a studio filmmaker, most of what you're going to be shooting is in real locations. So, you have to be able to react to the environment. As Linklater says in *Double Play*, Benning's films remind you how important and beautiful all those things are.

CHURCH

When Linklater invited us out to Austin to do this, he had already put together this small retrospective of Benning's films. And this is the guy who had just made *Before Midnight* which was just about to come out and had premiered in Berlin where he won a prize. You thought he would be out there doing press junkets or working deals with his agent to lock down his next picture. That week, when we were shooting, there was a story in the trades about how he had been attached to a Robert Redford movie with Nick Nolte. You think this guy is pullin' in deals, making calls, and there he is, in Austin, hanging out with Benning and our crew.

"THERE'S THIS MOMENT
WHICH I THINK I CUT OUT
THE MOVIE, WHERE (LINKLATER)
SAYS THAT MOVIES ARE BETTER
THAN CHURCH. AND THAT
PROVES, FOR ME, THAT
HE'S THE REAL DEAL."

He leaves his cell phone in the car. I never saw him anxious to be somewhere else. He's there, watching *13 Lakes*, watching *12 Skies*, completely attentive to everything that's going on. There's this moment, which I think I cut out of the movie, where he says that movies are better than church. And that proves that, for me, he's the real deal.

Like Benning, Linklater has a little place in the woods. He has a library there. There's a picture of Thoreau hanging on one of the walls. It's a sacred workplace for him. He told me that he works into the night. I admire not only his films, but the way he negotiates his life. He's an inspiring guy. I'd say, Rick, let's do this scene this afternoon, and he'd say, Gabe, I really need to put in some dad time. He would go off and spend a couple of hours with his daughters. He's a vegetarian. He has a pig in his house. He doesn't like to travel a lot. He's very local.

AUTEUR

Prior to making *Double Play*, I watched all of Linklater's films, and all of Benning's that are available. I told Benning, and he said that I had to watch *North On Evers*, because that's the one where he goes through Austin. He goes to all the spots where the victims of Charles Whitman – the Texas Tower sniper – died. He films from their vantage point.

Linklater is in the film. Lee Daniel, who was Linklater's long-time cinematographer, is in the film. This was just after he'd made *Slacker*. Once we had the material we wanted, I asked James to send the 16mm prints to a lab in Connecticut and they'd scan the prints. Ideally, if I had more time on the project, I'd have gone to James' office or the Austrian Film Museum and watched them properly. In the last few months prior to production I was watching exclusively Benning and Linklater films. When you watch, you start to make mental notes of internal references. Thematic preoccupations about a director's work. I was descriptive about those scenes and would try to push the thematic connectivity. As I would've done in a piece of criticism.

NOTRE TEMPS

The film is part of the series, Cinéma de notre Temps, which are innovative profiles of great filmmakers. I love them. Especially the ones that try and emulate the style of the director. The best ones are Jacques Rivette's Jean Renoir trilogy. That's amazing. These films were all made cheaply and quickly. They were always the opposite of the banal, talking-head approach. There's one I watched recently that doesn't really work because the sound is fucked up. It's an interview with Frank Capra on his avocado farm. The directors who made it went out to Hollywood and, within two weeks, they did Hawks, Ford, Keaton, Hitchcock, Capra, Mamoulian, Cukor. Everybody. Some of them worked, some of them didn't. With the Capra one, it didn't work. He had this loud golf-cart so they weren't able to get good audio. But it's still a glimpse of Capra's life, and I appreciated that.

In our case, we had about four days. No re-shoots. The agreement we had with them was totally informal. I had nothing in writing. They were not contractually obliged to turn up. It was a gentleman's agreement. But we worked all that out. I tried to push them as much as possible. But I had no idea. What if Benning doesn't like being filmed and walks out on us? It could happen. But he's actually very comfortable. I emailed the filmmaker Jon Jost because he shot a film with Benning recently. And I asked him what it was like. He told me that he works on his own and that he's extremely fast. That helped, because James can, perversely enough, be rather impatient. He'll happily stare at a lake for three hours. Benning loved the attention of the crew. No one really knew him, but he was such a presence. They were fascinated by him. And he gave that back to the film.

REAL LIFE

Rick suggested we watch *Boyhood* in his editing suite. I suggested we visit old shooting locations. We went to Mount Bonnell, where the ending of *Slacker* was photographed. James was interested as he'd never been there. But he did email me once saying, "movie locations aren't real life". Whatever that means. So there was some resistance. In the end, it all worked out beautifully. Linklater later said that he could see I was a "serious film guy" 🎬

12A CONTAINS INFREQUENT STRONG LANGUAGE, INCLUDING SOME DRUG & SEXUAL REFERENCES



A
RUBY
TAYLOR
- PRODUCTION -

Cronk Comics Presents...

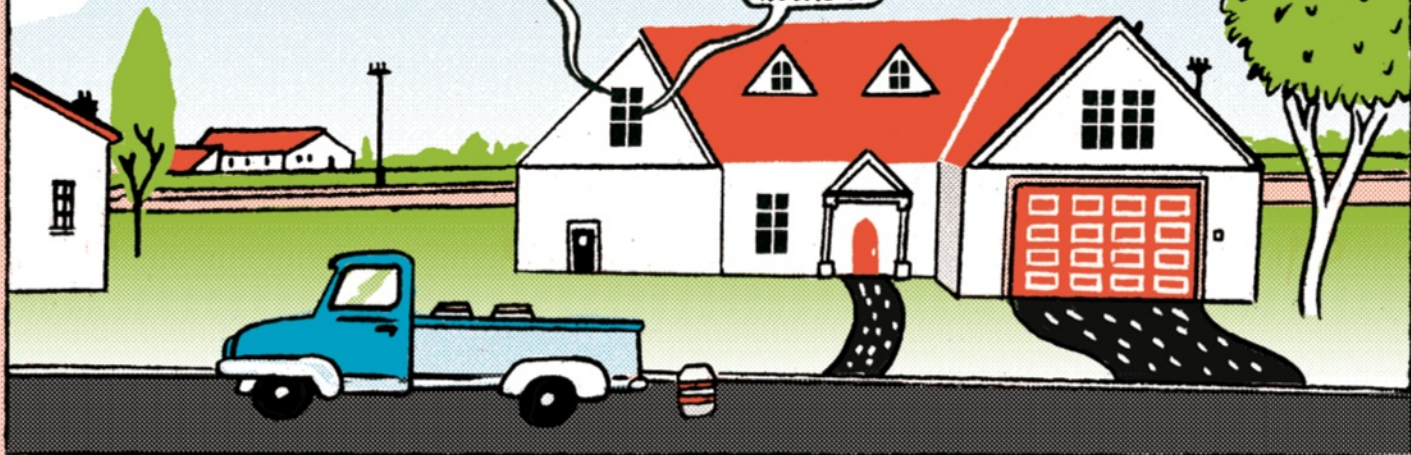
CITY LIMITS

LINKLATER'S AUSTIN
- PART ONE -

KEVIN! OPEN THIS DOOR...

DID YOU ORDER SOME KEGS OF BEER?

NO DAD...



YOU KIDS KNOW
ANYTHING ABOUT
A PARTY HERE
TONIGHT?

NO SIR.



"I HAD AS MUCH FUN AS I COULD WHEN I WAS STUCK IN THIS PLACE."

AS ONE OF THE QUINTESSENTIAL AUSTIN FILMMAKERS, RICHARD LINKLATER PAINTS A VIVID AND PERSONALISED PICTURE OF HIS ROISTERING HOMETOWN.


WORDS BY JORDAN CRONK. ILLUSTRATION BY RUBY TAYLOR.

On one of many memorable scenes featured in Richard Linklater's 2011 film *Bernie*, a middle-aged resident of Carthage outlines the "Five States" which make up the greater region of Texas. His summations range from superficial (West Texas: "a bunch of flat ranches") to humorous (North Texas: "snobs with their Mercedes") to inflammatory (Houston: "the carcinogenic coast") to simplistic (South Texas: "where the Tex meets the Mex"). But he saves his most biting comments for Central Texas, or as he so endearingly refers to it, "The People's Republic of Austin," a city "of hairy-legged women and liberal fruitcakes." Only someone with intimate knowledge of the Lone Star State could – with such a simultaneous sense of irreverence and affection – indict a region of the country which has come to define their work for over two decades. And indeed, it is Linklater's hometown of Austin that has provided the director with both a literal and figurative filmmaking foundation, a locale he has returned to again and again even as European (*Before Sunrise* and its sequels) and technological (*Waking Life*, *A Scanner Darkly*) persuasions have taken him far from familiar terrain.

Bernie was something of a homecoming for Linklater. Not only was it the first of his films to be set within Texas borders in well over a decade (though he did continue to shoot there over that span, the fruits of which can now be seen in his literally years-in-the-making *Boyhood*) but it was also his best film in nearly as long, reinstating a certain playful irony in his methodology, an approach that, while more narratively beholden, unmistakably echoes his earliest films in its provincial humour and interest in seemingly marginal personalities. Austin is therefore an appropriate home base for Linklater for couple of key reasons. First and foremost it is a city that has long been associated with youth culture, its well-oiled music scene a haven for artistically restless adolescents and hangers-on alike. Second, Austin holds a unique place in the greater consciousness, with the city's very American integration of the suburban and metropolitan, the traditional and contemporary, and the commercial and creative proving at once familiar and foreign to even the unacquainted.

For better or worse, *Slacker* (1991) solidified this perception of Austin in the minds of many viewers. And in a lot of ways it remains Linklater's quintessential film, casually outlining his major formal and thematic preoccupations: his interest in the temporal properties of the filmed image; the relationship between characters and their surroundings –

realised here as a near real-time succession of interactions between wayward adolescents, dispossessed martyrs, and self-satisfied troubadours; middle class life and the inadvertent boundaries such an existence constructs for young people uninterested in following in their parents' footsteps; and the existential aspects of growing up and eventually settling down, the latter realised with uncommon and increasing maturity across the extraordinary, Euro-steeped *Before* trilogy. Linklater's early, Austin-set films, however, remain his most personal. As filmic expressions of a developing artistic mind they are confident displays of cinematic assimilation, seemingly influenced by everyone from Altman to Rossellini. As semi-autobiographical texts they are by turns hilarious, painful, and poignant documents of a generation whose birthplace appears to afford so much but has proven to offer nothing more than a symbolic selection of dead-ends and cul-de-sacs built to maintain the status quo.

The two films that can be said to most ably represent the inherent contradiction of Linklater's Austin, then, are *Dazed and Confused* (1993) and *subUrbia* (1996). It's not as simple as identifying one as being emblematic of optimism and the other pessimism – though it is likewise not coincidental that the former remains the director's most widely beloved film while the latter lives in relative obscurity. One of the few instances of Linklater looking to the past to draw modern parallels rather than infusing the present with the weight of personal and generational history, *Dazed and Confused* is unapologetically fuelled by nostalgia. Though nominally set in 1976, its characters are part of an obvious continuum with the slackers and suburbanites of Linklater's modern day Austin; fashion and recreational habits may have slightly shifted, but the director reveals with effortless skill and insight just how little youth culture has actually changed in the interim. By that same token, if *subUrbia* is the dark, misanthropic inverse of *Dazed and Confused*, it is also arguably Linklater's most incisive vision of Gen X insecurity and societal and spatial suffocation. It is now decades later and teens are still swigging cheap beer down by the corner market and pondering the philosophical dimensions of their lives, but the violence has become more personal, the addictions more damaging, and the implications of each decision more viscerally palpable. For the students of *Dazed and Confused*, the morning after is simply the first day of summer vacation; for the kids of *subUrbia*, it is the first day of the rest of their lives. 



A RUBY
TAYLOR
PRODUCTION

LABUZA COMICS PRESENT

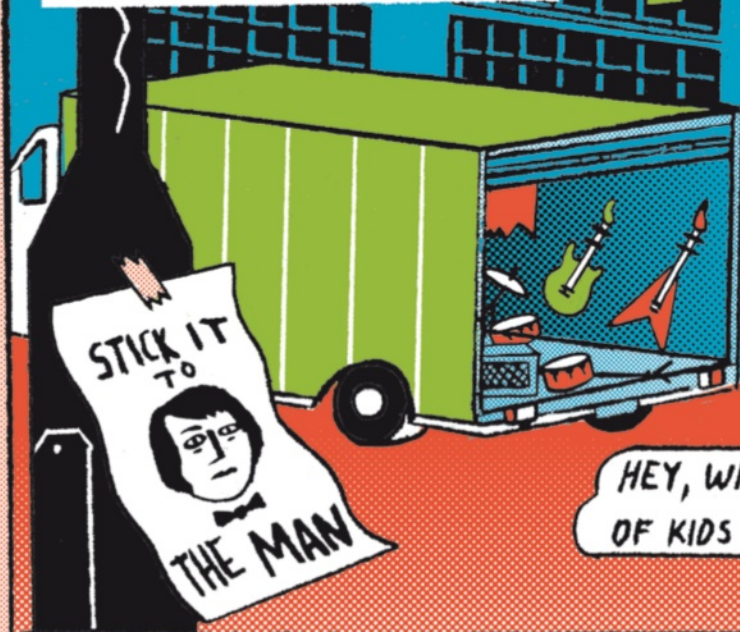
LINKLATER...

BEYOND TEXAS

the
CITY LIMITS
SERIES

PART
TWO

SOMEWHERE IN NEW YORK...



HEY, WHO LET THIS BUNCH
OF KIDS IN HERE...?



MEANWHILE

IN

VIENNA



RICHARD LINKLATER'S INQUISITIVE, TOURIST-EYE-VIEW OF CITIES AND LANDSCAPES LEADS HIM TO NATURALLY AVOID THE CLICHÉS.

WORDS BY **PETER LABUZA**. ILLUSTRATION BY **RUBY TAYLOR**.

Austin and the surrounding plains have long served as an essential character for many of Richard Linklater's best films. But, even though his mode is often thought of as being predominantly dialogue-driven, the capturing of landscapes has been a subtle, but inherent constituent of the director's features outside his home state. His trilogy of *Before Sunrise*, *Sunset*, and *Midnight*, as well as his two New York set films *School of Rock* and *Me and Orson Welles*, are surprisingly adept at bringing out specificities of their characters through landscape in a way dialogue cannot. Despite being a "tourist" to these cities, Linklater's non-Texan work reveals a filmmaker who has always emphasised space without necessarily using it to overpower the work.


Certainly of those two subsets, the *Before* trilogy takes tourism as its central concern. Each film frames the ambling strolls of Celine (Julie Delpy) and Jesse (Ethan Hawke) through European locales as transient moments of romantic longing. The cities themselves reflect this feeling of a dream-like space: the ghostly Vienna, the sunlit Paris, and the endless expanse of the southern Peloponnese islands in Greece. Linklater's long, fluid takes at first seem to accentuate the rambling, philosophical discussions between the two protagonists, but the use of each take creates a disorienting fantasy, where suddenly the backgrounds alter without us even noticing it. When the two disembark the train in Vienna in *Before Sunrise*, the first encounter they have with two tourists steers them clear of museums and landmarks. Instead they travel on trolleys, through cemeteries and into cafes on small stone corridors. This bohemian adventure makes each location the next step in the process of romance.

Linklater's Europe is hardly an insider's view of these cities in the way Austin is in *Slacker* or *Waking Life*. *Before Sunset* is sometimes criticised for its lack of fidelity to the geographical space of Paris, but the sunlit afternoon and simmering reflections of the Seine gives the sense of the city as a surreal dream. Instead of realism, Linklater creates a space where each camera movement down a new street could reveal a completely new world, as if he were making a Jacques Rivette film. In his essay on the final part of the trilogy, *Film Comment's* Phillip Lopate notes that each film defines Jesse and Celine through their willingness to play roles for each other. In a way, these European "stages" provide the setting. The spell only breaks when the two enter the nondescript hotel room of *Before Midnight*; but

once the two venture out again, the moonlit vista rekindles the romantic gamesmanship once more.

Back in America, Linklater's two New York-set films look like polar opposites: his huge mainstream hit, *School of Rock*, and his unfairly maligned period piece, *Me and Orson Welles*. *School of Rock* begins with a *Boogie Nights*-style tracking shot through the Brooklyn set bar where Jack Black's Dewey Finn rocks to an unreceptive crowd. But then it mostly abandons this smoky atmosphere for the wintry New Jersey locales of the school into which he sneaks as a fake substitute teacher. Black's audacious energy thus gives life to this grayish purgatory; his van creates a utopic old school rock euphoria against the cloudy backgrounds of suburbia. Linklater doesn't romanticise New Jersey – who could? – but instead, he uses it to make Black's character pop against it, as the children he teaches slowly brighten the space as well.

Heading back to the late '30s, *Me and Orson Welles* presents a unabashedly romantic view of New York, but balancing landmarks with more unique locations. As Zac Efron and Zoe Kazan walk out of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the final frames of the film, they talk about the world of possibilities ahead of them as the camera slowly pans up, placing them as tiny figures within the city's bustling population – they count for just one of eight million individual stories. If Linklater's other films deliberately forego landmarks for the off-centre worlds of marginal outcasts, here is the closest Linklater has ever come to something big: The Mercury Theatre and Orson Welles. But while the crux of the action takes place around a perfectly-reconstructed production of 'Macbeth', Linklater continually detours, not only to follow Efron's character and his various professional and romantic encounters, but often by staging interactions in more intimate spaces.

Linklater is a Texan filmmaker, but his talents lead to speculation that he would comfortably sink his cinematic roots in whatever city, state, or country he called home. It's clear in his work outside of the Lone Star State that his films have always taken the concept of location seriously, with landscape and story often melding into one. Perhaps that was why his remake of Michael Ritchie's *Bad News Bears* tanked, as it was shot in California, but bears few of the hallmarks – alternate or otherwise – of its setting. While the words and voices of his characters have often defined Linklater's career, his subtle use of landscape in all of his films has been his ace in the hole. 



ALTERNATE REALITIES

★★★★★★★★★ WORDS BY OLIVER LYTTTELTON • ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIMBA SMITS ★★★★★★★★★★

WE TRACE A LIGHTLY FICTIONALISED CAREER PATH FOR RICHARD LINKLATER VIA THE MOVIES HE ALMOST MADE, BUT DIDN'T.

It's taken Richard Linklater 12 years to bring *Boyhood* to the screens. Twelve years that have seen the filmmaker go through more ups and down than most, from the Oscar-nominated critical smashes *Before Sunrise* and *Before Midnight* and the box office surprise *School of Rock*, to critical and commercial disappointments like *Bad News Bears* and *Fast Food Nation*, and back again. Like almost every director, and perhaps most disappointingly of all, he's also spent that time collecting a series of unmade projects, most notably in the period between *Me and Orson Welles* in 2008 and *Bernie* in 2011, in which the usually prolific Linklater didn't make a single feature.

- MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 4 -

It's not that he was short of potential movies ("I turn down films all the time. I got offered a meeting on *Mission: Impossible 4*," and some horror films. And I thought, 'Me? What could I bring to that?," the director said in a 2010 interview), but it was

more that this time period saw a number of passion projects percolating without being able to quite get off the ground.

- SCHOOL OF ROCK 2: AMERICA ROCKS -

2003's *School of Rock* remains Linklater's biggest hit, and in the summer of 2008, not long before *Me and Orson Welles* premiered and half-a-decade after the release of the original, it was announced that a sequel was finally in the works. Penned by original writer Mike White, *School of Rock 2: America Rocks* was to see Jack Black return to play teacher Dewey Finn, taking students on a cross-country field trip tracing the history of rock'n'roll, bluegrass and hip-hop. But it seems to have been revealed to the world prematurely: Linklater said 12 months later that, "it's not on the front burner," and Black would eventually admit, "I tried really hard to get all the pieces together... we never all got together and saw eye-to-eye on what the script would be."

- THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT -

That wasn't the only follow-up to a beloved Linklater picture in the works at the time. As far back as 2007, Linklater started talking about a college-set follow-up to his 1993 high-school classic *Dazed and Confused*. In a similarly autobiographical vein to the earlier movie, the new film – known, at one point, by the title *That's What I'm Talking About* – was seen as likely to focus on a new set of characters (though there were reports that Matthew McConaughey's Wooderson would make a return). Yet, the tone of *Dazed* would remain. "It's like if Mitch [Wiley Wiggins' character] went off to college, so sequentially it's [set in] 1980," Linklater told an interviewer last year. "It's all that partying you do before the first class, if you get three or four days, so it's a long weekend of college."

Unfortunately, we still haven't gotten to see the filmmaker's take on the US equivalent of fresher's week: despite the moderately commercial premise (he compared it to *The Hangover* at one point, saying it involved "real male behavior, young men behaving really poorly"), and financing being lined up, no distributors bit, worried about the lack of big names involved. Linklater still hopes it'll get there, though, and the conclusion of *Boyhood*, which sees Wiggins look-a-like Ellar Coltrane arrive for his first weekend of college, gives a taste of what to expect if it ever arrives (the filmmaker admitted that, while shooting the final segment of *Boyhood* last summer, he told the cast, "This is a complete overlap with a movie I hope to make one day").

- COLLEGE REPUBLICANS -

Linklater also flirted briefly with the higher-education themed *College Republicans*, a script that topped the annual Black List of unproduced screenplays and had Paul Dano, and then later Shia LaBeouf, circling the role of the young version of neo-conservative hate-figure Karl Rove. It ultimately came to naught, though it's now gearing up again with *Kill Your Darlings* director John Krokidas reuniting with stars Daniel Radcliffe and Dane DeHaan. But the real heartbreaker was another Black List script that got closer than any of the above to getting before cameras, only to fall apart at the last hurdle: a screenplay called *Liars (A to E)*.

"AS LEGEND HAS IT, EMMA FORREST WROTE LIARS (A TO E) IN THE THREE DAYS FOLLOWING HER BREAK-UP FROM THEN-BOY-FRIEND, COLIN FARRELL."

- LIARS (A TO E) -

Former British journalist Emma Forrest had been writing screenplays since 2001 (her first job was an aborted Jeff Buckley biopic for Brad Pitt's company, when she was only in her early twenties), but first rose about the parapet after she penned *Liars (A to E)* in 2009. As legend has it, she did so in the space of three days after breaking up with her then-boyfriend, Colin Farrell. It sold swiftly to Miramax, landed in the hands of producer Scott Rudin, and then Linklater came on board to direct, with casting announcements following soon after.

Set in the then-very-recent past of late 2008 and very early 2009, the screenplay focuses on Bacall (who was to have been played by Rebecca Hall), a baker on the edge of turning 30, whose business has just gone under, and whose rock star fiancée Mark has dumped her, claiming he's just not capable of staying in a committed relationship. Distraught, and owing the hospital \$18,000 after breaking her nose, she enlists the help of her best friend and former employee Elishia (a role that *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* and *Thor* actress Kat Dennings would have taken) to take a road-trip to Obama's inauguration, reclaiming gifts she gave various ex-boyfriends along the way in order to clear her debts.

When described like that, it might sound oppressively quirky, but Forrest's script is anything but: it's organic and uncontrived, snappy and sharp without feeling precious, fitfully surreal without losing control of its grounding in reality. There's an inspired moment near the end that involves Bacall sleeping, off-screen, with a legendary musician. It's legitimately moving, earning its emotional payoff while you're looking the other way.

If it had shot as intended in 2009 for a release in 2010, it would have beaten the recent run of Y-chromosome-free comedies such as *Bridesmaids* to the screen, but it's possible that, with Linklater at the helm, it would have been a cut above those films. His loose, freewheeling comic taste seems like a perfect fit for the material. With the exception of his collaborations with Julie Delpy on the *Before* movies, he's also always been a predominantly male-focused director (let's just say there's a reason it's called *Boyhood*), so it would have been especially intriguing to see Linklater get his hands dirty on a film that centers, more than anything, on a female friendship.

Sadly, it wasn't to be. Almost as soon as Miramax flashed the green light, Disney essentially shut down their indie subsidiary, and it was sold on the following year. The film was trapped in purgatory, and eventually Linklater came to believe, with the plot so closely tied to Obama's inauguration (it hooks sweetly into a certain feeling of hope that was so prevalent in 2008, but is harder to bottle now we're into the second term), that the window had "passed" 🕒



BY APPOINTMENT TO
HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN



BY APPOINTMENT TO
HIS MAJESTY THE KING



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HEADLINE BUT ONE INSCRIBED WITH VISUAL
LYRICISM, EMOTIONAL WEIGHT AND
A BELIEF IN INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS"



NEW YORK TIMES

"SOME TIME SINCE I'VE SEEN
A DRAMA TACKLE THE MORAL
COMPLEXITIES OF REVENGE QUITE
SO BRUTALLY - AND SO WELL"



DAN GREEN CINE-VUE

"WILL MAKE YOU DRAW BREATH,
IN AWE BUT ALSO IN FEAR"



ROBBIE COLLIN, THE TELEGRAPH

"CLEAR DEBTS TO TARANTINO'S
RIFFS ON THE GENRE"



PETER BRADSHAW, THE GUARDIAN

"BEAUTIFUL, VIOLENT,
HYPNOTIC"

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ACTION MOVIE OF THE YEAR"

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A TOUCH OF SIN

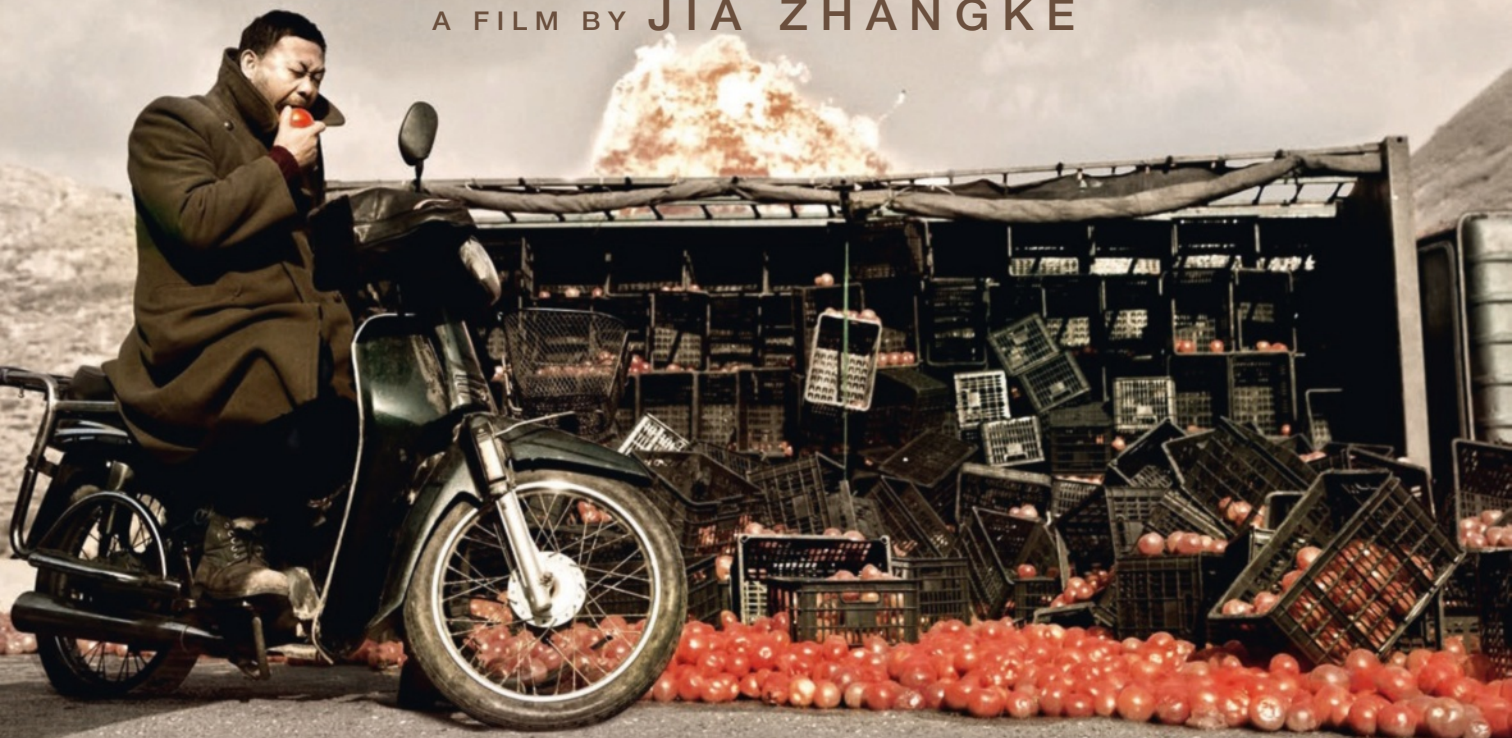
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A FILM BY JIA ZHANGKE

15
SUITABLE ONLY FOR PERSONS OF
15 YEARS AND OVER

WINNER BEST SCREENPLAY
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SELECTION
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IN SELECTED CINEMAS NATIONWIDE MAY 16

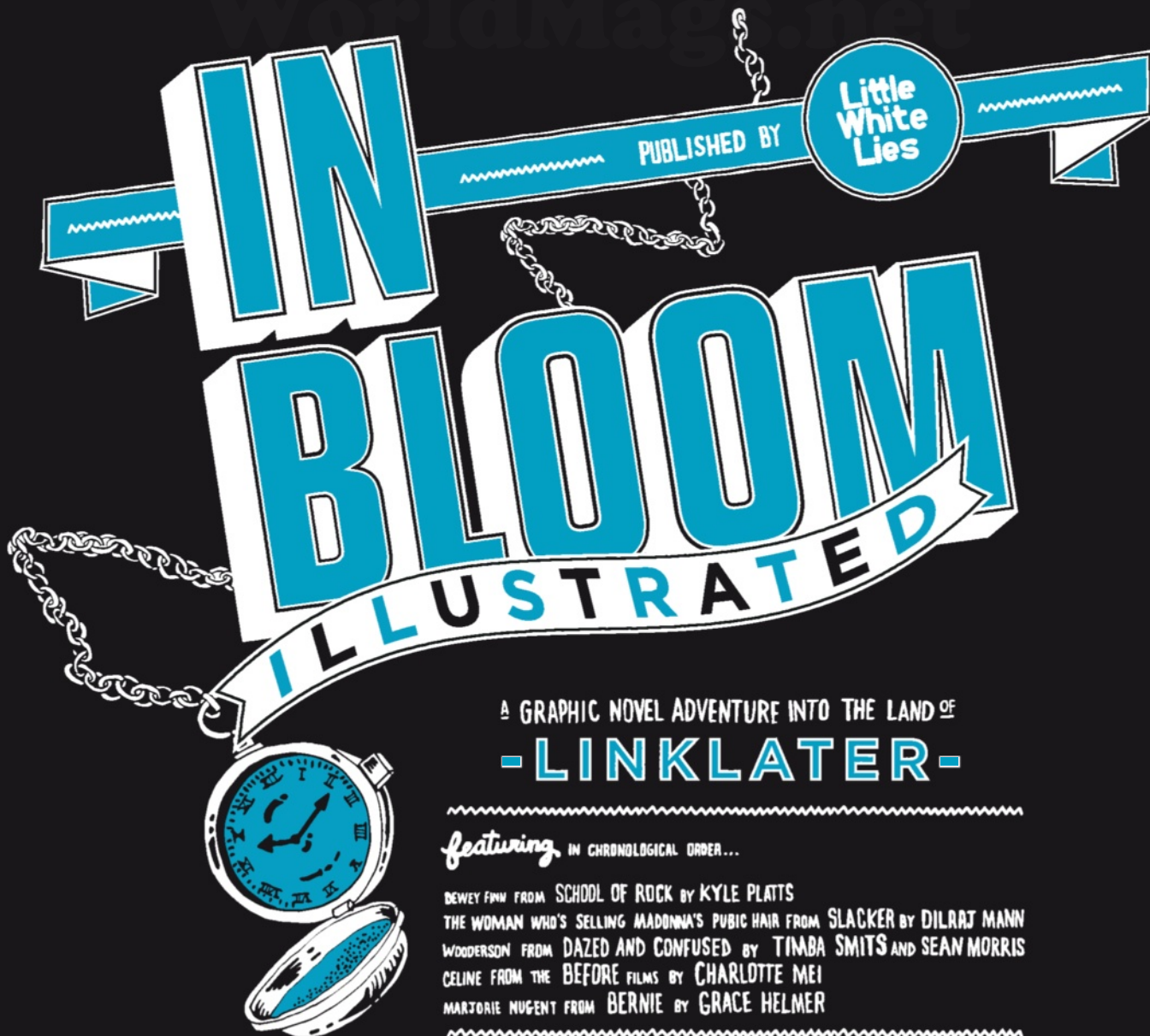
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DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY YU LIKWAH MUSIC BY LIN GONG EDITOR ZHANG WANG ART DIRECTOR LIU WEXIN COSTUME DESIGNER ZHANG WANG EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JIA ZHANG-KE MASAYUKI MOBI BEN ZHONGLUN WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY JIA ZHANG-KE
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ARROW FILMS



A GRAPHIC NOVEL ADVENTURE INTO THE LAND OF
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featuring IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER...

DEWEY FINN FROM SCHOOL OF ROCK BY KYLE PLATTS
THE WOMAN WHO'S SELLING MADONNA'S PUBIC HAIR FROM SLACKER BY DILRAJ MANN
WOODERSON FROM DAZED AND CONFUSED BY TIMBA SMITS AND SEAN MORRIS
CELINE FROM THE BEFORE FILMS BY CHARLOTTE MEI
MARJORIE NUGENT FROM BERNIE BY GRACE HELMER

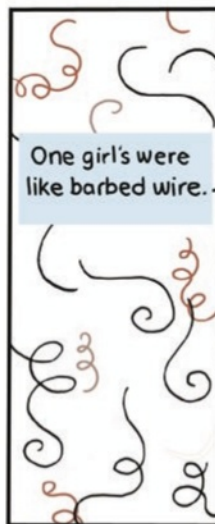
TIME PASSES US BY AT AN UPSETTING RATE OF KNOTS, AND NO
FILMMAKER IS AS ATTUNED TO THIS CONCEPT AS RICHARD LINKLATER.
INSPIRED BY HIS LATEST FEATURE, *BOYHOOD*, *LWLIES* INVITES YOU ON AN
APOCRYPHAL NOSTALGIA TOUR BACK TO THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF A CLUTCH
OF LINKLATER'S MOST INSPIRED CREATIONS. WE GAVE FIVE ARTISTS
A SINGLE PAGE, IN RETURN FOR THEM DELIVERING NOTHING
LESS THAN A FRAGMENT OF IMAGINED HISTORY.

SCHOOL & ROCK

PART 2

THE IDENTITY FRAUD LAWSUIT





AFTER DAZED AND CONFUSED COMES...

THE MISADVENTURES OF WOODERSON

EX HIGH-SCHOOL
QUARTERBACK



Before Cyber Dusk

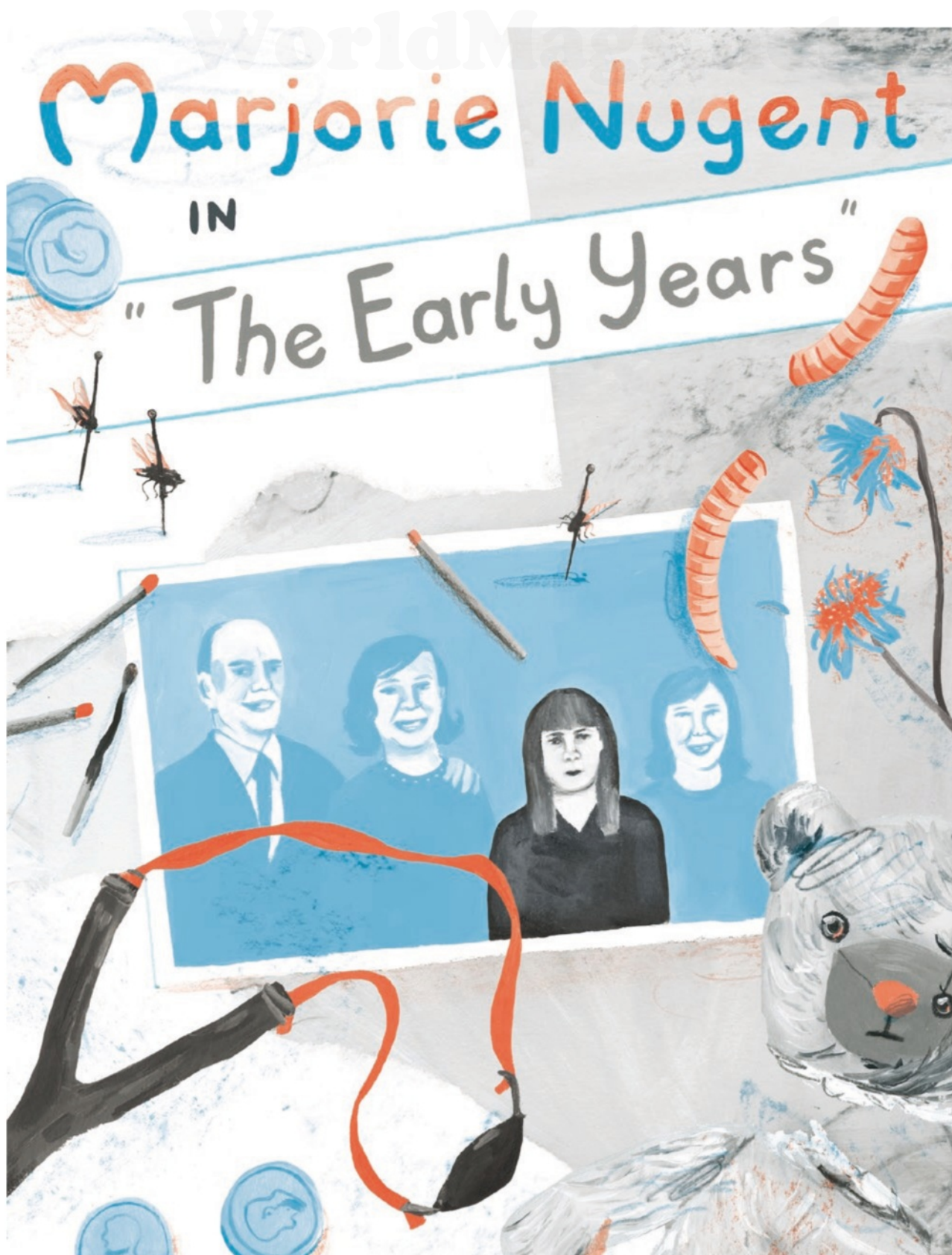
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Sinner Man

A new Blu-ray box set and full cinema retrospective offer keys to the labyrinthine castle of licentious Polish dreamcatcher, Walerian Borowczyk.

When Polish filmmaker Walerian Borowczyk died at age 82 in 2006, the collective wail of grief issued by the film world barely registered against that which accompanied the respective passing of Shohei Imamura and Robert Altman the same year. Borowczyk hadn't made a feature film in nearly 20 years, and in the interim his reputation had been all but eclipsed. There had been a time, though, when it was the equal of anyone's — and Borowczyk's films, dredging the subconscious murk, are always due for an atavistic return.

In his seminal volume, 'Film as a Subversive Art', Amos Vogel identified Borowczyk's 1959 animated short *Dom*, made in collaboration with Jan Lenica, as the "first intimation of a Polish film avant-garde entirely free of the sterilism of socialist realism." A series of vignettes imagining an idle housewife's inner life, achieved through the full gamut of animation techniques, *Dom* set a fair precedent for Borowczyk's work to come, which was steeped in fantasy, including — increasingly, explicitly and monomaniacally — consuming erotic fantasy.

In *Dom*, the imagination is a means of processing an unacceptable reality that is chartered, stifling and oppressive. The film's refraining image, in which a woman stares down the camera as though to offer the audience a vantage on her soul, recurred in Borowczyk's films. "All I do is express everyone's dreams," the director says in an early '80s video interview, responding to a French interlocutor whose previous comment is, "I've seen many of your films and I think you're a big pervert".

This is far from an atypical viewpoint. David Thomson went so far as to call Borowczyk "one of the major talents of modern cinema, arguably the finest talent that Eastern Europe has produced" in his 'Biographical Dictionary of Film'. The entry, however, ended on a note of disappointment, suggesting that Borowczyk had lost his way through singleminded devotion

to the subject of sex. My own introduction to Borowczyk came by way of salacious interest — the unforgettable cover image of the Cult Epics DVD of Borowczyk's *The Beast*, which depicts a pair of hairy paws approaching a woman's naked backside. The very fine cinematographer Sean Price Williams recently told me that he'd seen the movie "probably 30 or 40 times," and that Borowczyk's films were an ever-present visual reference point for him, particularly for the sense of the presence of objects that Borowczyk gets, and his knack for distributing importance evenly among items in the frame, even inanimate ones. Williams also correctly pointed out that *The Beast* is in many respects a very bad movie, an unwieldy setting for a short film which had been made separately and was then intercut into the feature narrative. That one has to negotiate with much dross in order to enjoy Borowczyk's genius is a plain fact.

The Beast concerns the arrival of a pretty, very rich young Englishwoman, Lucy (Lisbeth Hummel), virginal but ripe-to-bursting, at a French château. She is arranged to be married to the son of the château's owner, though the boy is a dullard who prefers to watch his horses mate. The plans have in fact been brought about by the boy's father, who is scheming to repair the family's diminished fortunes. Lucy, however, becomes fixated on the legend of a distant ancestor, Romilda, who some 200 years ago was waylaid by a beast in the forest. Retiring to her chamber at night, Lucy thrashes about while pleasuring herself to imaginings of 18th century bestiality.

The film was originally shot as part of Borowczyk's great 1974 anthology, *Immoral Tales*, and it involves an actress being chased through the woods by what appears to be a giant badger with a huge priapic hard-on, until she finally "overcomes" her attacker by pleasuring him to death. *The Beast* contains much sniggery

anti-clericalism, caricatured performances, and an occasional feeling of bargain-basement Buñuel — and yet it is all worthwhile for one cut-away shot to Romilda's discarded slipper against a field of greenery, a slug inching its way across it.

Today, Borowczyk is more likely to be mentioned in the company of directors specialising in what's sometimes pejoratively called Eurosleaze, say Jesús Franco or Jean Rollin, rather than as an equal of countrymen like Roman Polanski or Jerzy Skolimowski. In the decades that have passed since his celebrated animated shorts first appeared, Borowczyk has been downgraded from major figure to become the property of a minicult of enthusiasts — though this situation may be due to change very soon. This June, Arrow Films will release a box set called 'Camera Obscura: The Walerian Borowczyk Collection', containing restored versions of Borowczyk's best-regarded works. Its release will be accompanied by an English translation of 'Anatomy of the Devil', a collection of short stories by Borowczyk that were originally published in Polish in 1992, and a book of essays on Borowczyk's oeuvre edited by scholars Michael Brooke and Daniel Bird, the latter being responsible for a short documentary about the director entitled *Obscure Pleasures*. All of this will be preceded by a retrospective of Borowczyk's work under the auspices of the 12th Kinoteka Polish Film Festival, jointly hosted by the BFI Southbank and ICA, the latter whom will also be displaying Borowczyk's art on paper.

Borowczyk is an animator-turned-live-action filmmaker, a route also followed by the likes of Frank Tashlin and Terry Gilliam — whose decoupage, cut-and-paste stop-motion table animations, aesthetic of antique clutter, and surrealist humour owe a great deal to the Pole. But above and before all of this, Borowczyk is a designer-turned-filmmaker, to which



something of his original style must be due. He studied painting, sculpture, and lithography at the Academy of Fine Art in Krakow and, after graduation, became a recognised film poster artist, like his compatriot Jan Lenica. (Even after having established himself as a filmmaker, Borowczyk continued mostly to create the posters for his own films.) After the international success of *Dom*, Borowczyk relocated to Paris, where he would live and work for the rest of his life. There he collaborated with Chris Marker — on 1959's *Les astronautes* — and, on his own, began reeling out the run of animated shorts on which much of his reputation rests.

The shorts display an astonishing diversity of styles. 1958's *School* is made up of a series of still photographs which are arranged to create a choppy sort of animation, and has the character of one of Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies. In it, a uniformed man is put through a number of calisthenic exercises, then dozes off to dream of marching female legs. (Here again: the primacy of the dream life.) 1963's *Renaissance* is stop-motion, depicting a roomful of detritus reconstituting itself into still-life perfection before an explosion reduces the scene to ruin again. 1965's *Les Jeux des Anges*, made with the victims of Auschwitz in mind, consists of a series of panning motions across painted tableaux, a network of stained, dank rooms, sinister plumbing and images of severed, discarded wings. It's a work as weighty and worked-over as 1965's *Le Dictionnaire de Joachim* — a series of cocktail napkin sketch punchlines — is light and dashed off. Yet for all of this stylistic flittering, on each of these films Borowczyk's signature is unmistakable. He is that rare filmmaker for whom almost every individual work seems to contain the nucleus of the whole body of work.

Borowczyk completed his first feature, *The Mr. and Mrs. Kabal's Theatre*, in 1967 — expanding a previous short, using the scratchy

line familiar from *Le dictionnaire de Joachim* — and for his second, the following year's *Goto: Island of Love*, he went live-action. *Goto* takes place in what will become recognisable as a typically cloistered Borowczykian setting, within the walls of a fortress city on an island nation that might be somewhere off the coast of Klopstakia in WC Fields' *Million Dollar Legs*.

All progress has been stopped for generations by a devastating earthquake that killed off most of the population. There is an epidemic of flies, as though the island itself is a decomposing corpse. All contact with the mainland is forbidden by the dictatorial leader-for-life. Most curiously of all, everyone's name begins with a 'G'. Everything here is worn-out, scuffed, rusted, creaky, threadbare — this might very well be Eastern Europe, held in arrested development under the senescent Communist leadership.

The film's principal figure is a lowly exterminator named Grozo (Guy Saint-Jean), who uses all manner of machinations to climb his way to the very corridors of power, in the hope of winning the hand of the dictator's wife (Ligia Branice aka Mrs Borowczyk, who was also the star of Marker's *La Jetée* — a film that the conclusion of *Goto* seems to refer to). In its air of epidemic laziness and sun-stunned lassitude, *Goto* bears a superficial resemblance to Werner Herzog's debut feature, *Signs of Life*, which was released the same year, but while lust is rarely assigned principal importance in Herzog's universe, for Borowczyk it's the engine that puts all matter in motion.

The largely accepted line on Borowczyk is that his increased fixation on sex corresponded roughly to his move to live-action filmmaking and an increased permissiveness in cinema which duly led to a general decline in the quality of his artistic output. It's worth noting, however, that one of Borowczyk's best live-action films, 1972's *Blanche*, is concerned

with chastity rather than license. The film is freely adapted from the epic poem 'Mazeppa', written in 1840 by Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki. (Borowczyk frequently worked from time-tested sources, and elsewhere would take on Stendhal, RL Stevenson and Ovid.) Here again we find another one of Borowczyk's closed worlds — to paraphrase Godard, all he needed to make a movie was a girl and a castle. The setting is a French château during the time of the Crusades; the object of desire is Blanche (Branice), the young wife of the elderly lord of the manor (Michel Simon, a hoary old anarchist working with a young one).

Both the visiting king (Georges Wilson) and his playboy page (Jacque Perrin) pay Blanche court, though it is her faithful stepson (Lawrence Trimble) who loves her truly and tragically. Borowczyk shoots the castle in such a way as to make it seem like a puzzle box of isolated, interlocking compartments, as endless and inescapable as the dismal cells that make up *Les Jeux des anges*, the fortress of *Goto*, or the manor in *The Beast*.

Altogether Borowczyk would complete 14 feature films, the last being 1987's *Love Rites*. It is impossible to ignore evidence that the director of *Blanche* and *Immoral Tales* had lost a step by the time *Emmanuelle V* was completed in 1987, though he never lost his compositional originality, and he rarely shot lacklustre or lazy images. Like his countryman Andrzej Żuławski, Borowczyk was never a boring director, and his passion for toppling order is an ever-renewable source of vigour.

Borowczyk is never out-of-date, because he is on the side of youth against age, liberation against suppression, upheaval against stultifying tradition. The quintessence of this Renaissance man can be found in his *Renaissance*, with its image of cyclical devastation and renewal. The film offers a clear message: Rip it up and start again. 🍷

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The Wind Rises

Directed by HAYAO MIYAZAKI

Starring HIDEAKI ANNO, MIORI TAKIMOTO, MANSAI NOMURA

Released 9 MAY

REVIEWS

The concept of taking flight, of casually defying the sorry lot of the human land-lubber, is a central concern of Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki. That gossamer film which separates the realms of bustling fantasy and horrific reality is often punctured by some plucky hero (or, more often, heroine) lifting off the ground and leaving such Earthbound givens as the laws of physics in a beautifully rendered dust trail. Animation, the creative medium in which Miyazaki operates, is fantastical by design, meaning that suspending disbelief when “human” characters take flight is far less of a push. It’s ironic, and perhaps even a little perverse, then, that the director’s purported final encore opts to literally chronicle the wondrous world of early aviation, particularly the creation of the Mitsubishi A6M Zero, which was pivotal to the Japanese fire-bombing of Pearl Harbour.

Studio Ghibli diehards may be unsure of what to do with the film, how best to categorise and compartmentalise it among a catalogue of films that all make some kind affirmative concession towards age, gender and (relatively) broad taste. Gone are the loopy, expressionist flights of fancy, the occasionally hectoring environmental sub-themes and the customary panoply of cute critters and goofy comic side-players.

In their place, though, is a melodrama so earnest, rousing and robustly built that you’d swear it had been penned by some on-the-clock huckster chain-smoking in the backrooms of a Hollywood studio circa 1940. Miyazaki has selected Jirô Horikoshi as his subject, a goggle-eyed boy wonder engineer from the pre-war era working for the then-fledgling Mitsubishi corporation and given creative free rein to invent fighter planes to rival those of Germany and the US.

Yet Horikoshi’s pacifist tendencies mean that he finds it tough to hand over his designs for use in war games.

In many ways, *The Wind Rises* is biography as autobiography, telling of the triumphs and traumas of Horikoshi’s young life as much as it does the director’s own, much publicised feelings about his chosen metier. Horikoshi’s aviation idol, Count Giovanni Caproni, assures him during a number of markedly restrained fantasy sequences that, “Airplanes are dreams” — could the same not be said of cinema, with the two men tasked with producing a product that’s ideologically rooted in the realms of fantasy?

Both men are also prone to biomorphing — that is taking the simple, sturdy designs offered up by nature and co-opting them as inspiration to execute their craft: Horikoshi bases his wing ribs on the dainty curve of the mackerel bone; Miyazaki, for example, uses samples of human voices for all of the film’s sound effects (propellers, trains, an earthquake, etc).

Though *The Wind Rises* would arguably fall into the bracket of the traditional biopic, it’s interesting by dint of it being a formal conceit never before adopted by the Ghibli stable. And yes, it does adhere to conventional story arcs and reaches a somewhat predictable conclusion, yet Miyazaki stands at a valuable distance from his subject, never second guessing his intellectual development and never overplaying his lengthy bouts of sadness and confusion.

Satisfyingly, for a film about an inventor, there’s a noticeable dearth of “eureka!” moments, where circumstances handily conspire to move the plot forward. Instead, this comes across as a dramatically unadorned take on Horikoshi’s life, a saga that works as a collection of episodes

and imperative moments and that steers thankfully clear of contrivance — something that Miyazaki the writer has, in the past, not always been capable of.

The Wind Rises stands alongside *Grave of the Fireflies* as one of Ghibli’s most adult-oriented works. Though it’s choreographed with all the priggish whimsy of a pre-code romance, it even offers up the studio’s first bona fide sex scene. Still, it’s doubtful that ankle-biters will get very much at all from the film, unless they’re ankle-biters with a fixation on cross versus flat-head screws or the mechanical minutiae of wing struts.

With its abrupt downer ending, the film finally reveals its concealed sense of morbid curiosity, juxtaposing the mass destruction of Horikoshi’s gliding dream machines with the natural, very sad disintegration of the human body. On deeper reflection, this is perhaps a film which — like all great works of art — strives to embed its themes so deep within the text that, to some, they might appear invisible. More than a film about one man’s mystification as to how creativity can directly equate to violence, the overarching philosophical intimations suggest a work which highlights the unseen knock-on devastation that comes from any and all acts of nobility. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. *A titan of animation proffers his swansong.*

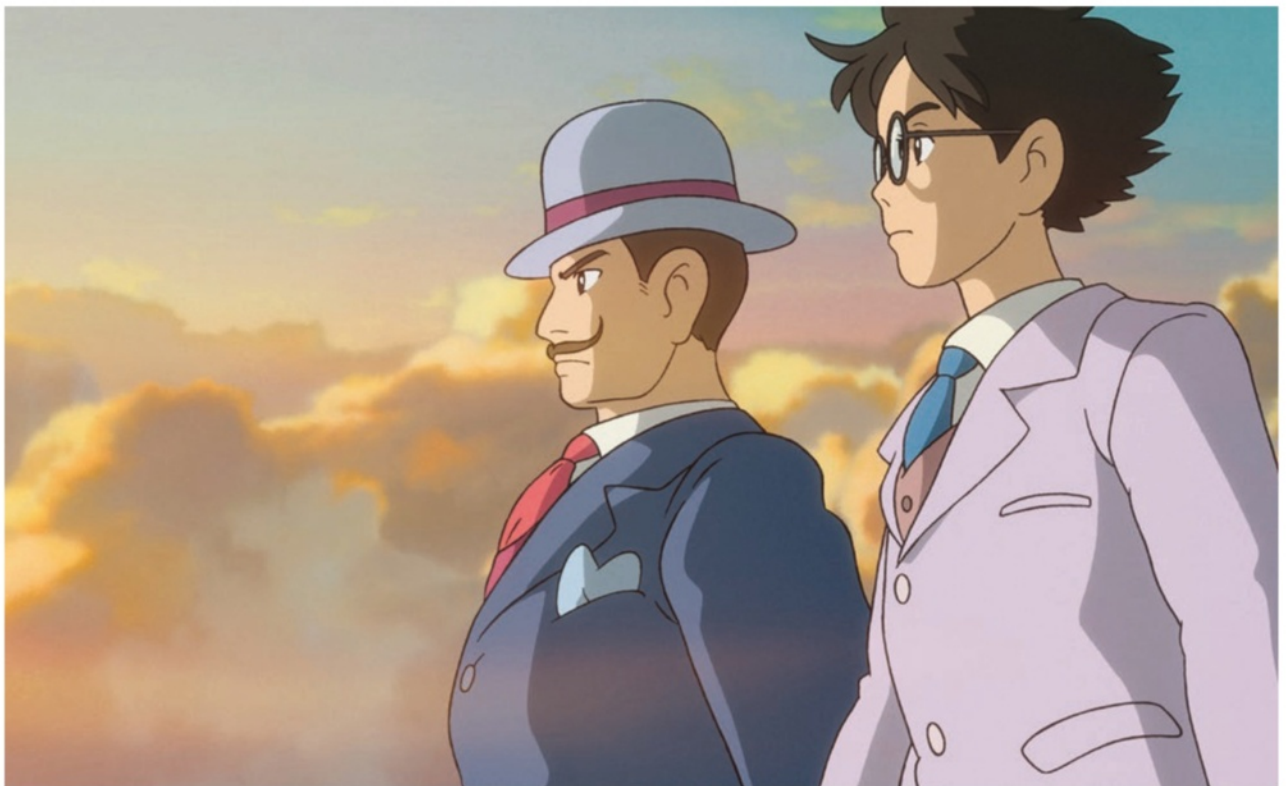
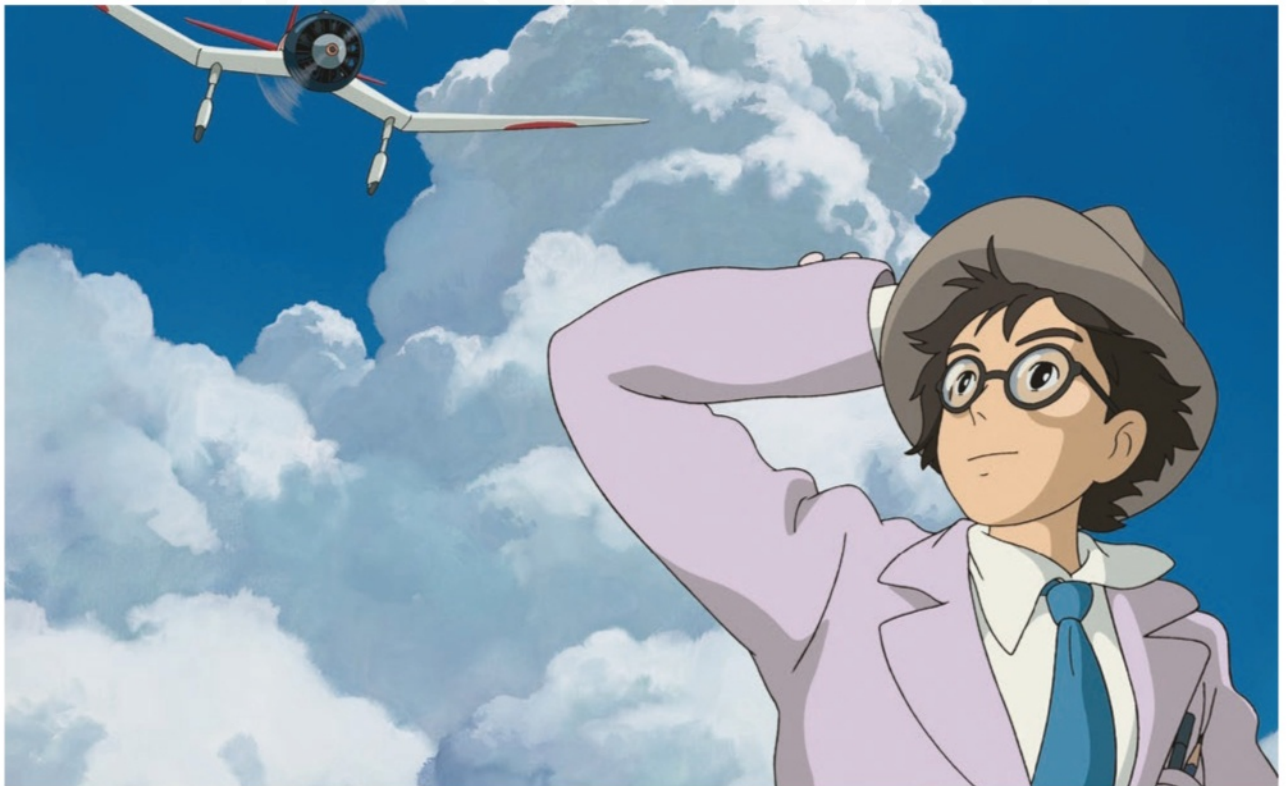
4

ENJOYMENT. *Unlike any Studio Ghibli movie. Unlike any animated movie. Strange and heartbreaking.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *The one that Miyazaki will be remembered for.*

5





The Films of Hayao Miyazaki

To truly understand the films of Studio Ghibli maestro, Hayao Miyazaki, you must look east for the fine details.

When a filmmaker announces his next project will be his last, it suggests this will be the moment to say those things still left unsaid. In the case of Hayao Miyazaki, *The Wind Rises* is evidently suffused with personal feeling, since its saga of an idealistic aero engineer whose work is co-opted by Japan's WWII military strike force obviously refers to his own father, whose company made the rudders for the iconic fighter planes which attacked Pearl Harbour. While this unique connection with the country's troubled past would seem to make this new film more directly Japanese than the fantastical and mythological stories which have brought Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli worldwide success, however, it's worth remembering that the worlds of *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbour Totoro* and *Nausicaä* spring just as much from Miyazaki's rich interaction with Japanese culture and history.

It doesn't make the Catbus from *Totoro* any less cute, or the spectacular man-versus-nature battles in *Princess Mononoke* any less fierce to see it from the perspective of a Western viewer, but Miyazaki's filmography is so packed with thematic assumptions and nuance familiar to Japanese audiences, that the creative context of this quintessentially Japanese artist requires deeper digging. Here's a few starting points towards understanding the Japanese-ness of Miyazaki.

Reach for the Sky Lessons from History

The joy of flight is a constant in Miyazaki's films, from 1930s Italian seaplanes in *Porco Rosso* to the huge airborne contraption that is Howl's Moving Castle. While the desire for escape and the metaphorical idealism of taking to the sky seemingly holds universal appeal, for Miyazaki's generation of Japanese it has a whole other layer of meaning. Having escaped the flames of an American air-raid at four-years-old, those memories have since resonated through Miyazaki's film career, where skies

which promise freedom can also be used to drop bombs and destroy lives. His colleague Isao Takahata's classic drama *Grave of the Fireflies* may be the most direct Ghibli treatment of the subject, yet such wartime experiences are surely the source of the defiant pacifism running through the Miyazaki oeuvre. They're also the crux of the tragedy in *The Wind Rises*, where cherished dreams of designing faster, better aircraft can only be realised by participating in Japan's deadly aerial war machine.

Making a Stand The Individual and Society

In so many aspects of daily life the Japanese value consensus and conformity to a degree sometimes hard to fathom (electing the same ossified political party for decades, being but one example), yet Miyazaki's stories, perhaps as befits a former film industry union organiser, time and again see individuals challenge the status quo. From fighting against state power in *Princess Mononoke* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, or even just tackling the seemingly rigid power structure within the closed community of the magical bath-house in *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki protagonists consistently develop a sense of self by following their own path. This might be a given in Western film narratives, but such anti-establishment resistance means something extra in Japan.

Girl Power Beyond Emancipation


Like the preponderance of flying machines, the determined young heroine is a constant in Miyazaki's celluloid realm, something which again takes on an extra resonance in Japan, where social attitudes and the workplace remain male-dominated to a startling degree. For the freedom fighter Nausicaä, the embattled Princess Mononoke, or even plucky Chihiro dealing with the topsy-turvy environs of *Spirited Away*, their struggle isn't just a matter

of equal rights or emancipation, it's primarily about the expression of values of compassion and understanding. Most significantly, it's their caring, nurturing worldview — aligned to their courage and resourcefulness — which signals the possibility of a future run along different lines than the rule of fear and aggression which has proven Japan's undoing in the past.

Another Green World The Spirit of Nature

Whether it's *My Neighbour Totoro*'s cuddly creatures or the powerful forest gods in *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki's stories emerge from Japanese culture's particular understanding of the natural world. Combine the pantheist underpinnings of the Shinto religion with the country's myriad folkloric tales of interaction and transformation between man, animal and spirit world, and you arrive at a holistic understanding of a universal essence uniting humanity and our natural surroundings. Since Japan's post-war economic resurgence was often achieved at the expense of environmental destruction, these are values Miyazaki is keen we don't forget.

Ma Motion and Emotion

While Miyazaki's cultural context seemingly impacts significantly on the content of his stories, there's also something specifically Japanese about their manner of telling which differentiates his film from those of his Western counterparts. So often it's the small moments of repose, reflection or anticipation which draw us into the inner world of his characters. "We have a word for that in Japanese," Miyazaki told Roger Ebert in a 2002 interview. "It's called ma. Emptiness. It's there intentionally. If you just have non-stop action with no breathing space at all, it's just busyness. But if you take a moment, the tension building in the film can grow to a wider dimension" 



Heli

Directed by AMAT ESCALANTE

Starring ARMANDO ESPITIA, ANDREA VERGARA, LINDA GONZÁLEZ

Released 23 MAY

Early in Amat Escalante's *Heli*, a man is forced to roll around in his own vomit. By the end of *Heli*, you might feel as if you've been forced to do the same — much to the satisfaction of Escalante, no doubt, who seems to take a strange delight in degradation. The film boasts an exhaustive catalogue of suffering: over the course of 105 minutes we're asked to endure beatings, shootings, stranglings, abductions, rapes, a public hanging, and, most ostentatiously, the vivid eradication of a man's privates, last seen wilting in a plume of CGI flame. Not even an adorable puppy is spared. What's disturbing about all of this violence, in Escalante's conception, is not so much its intensity or ubiquity as its utter pointlessness: in the world of the film, pain is meted out arbitrarily to those who least deserve it, and disorder reins free without meaning or reason.

It's to this end that in scenes of abject cruelty, Escalante emphasises indifference. The banality of evil abounds: children enjoy a bit of PlayStation as men are casually flogged with a cricket bat a few feet away, the main event at the world's worst LAN party. Meanwhile one torturer asks another what their latest victim did to deserve his grisly

punishment; the other doesn't know and, naturally, doesn't care. It's apparently not shocking enough that these men will put a match to your manhood. They won't even do you the courtesy of finding out why.

The eponymous hero of *Heli* becomes embroiled in the machinations of a drug war quite by accident, and his debasement at their hands therefore takes on the resonance of the cosmically ill-fated. It can be read that the ruination that unceremoniously descends upon Heli's life despite his innocence is meant to signify something about the state of modern Mexico — to impress upon an international arthouse audience some sense of life's severity south of the border. Alas, this is hardly a novel theme in 2014, and it's difficult to imagine anybody for whom this news will come as a revelation (Nicole Kidman, perhaps?). It's become a veritable tradition in Mexican cinema to trade in brutality and squalor — indeed, it's enough to make you think that casual barbarism had come to define the national character. To the degree that this trend reflects a shared cultural anxiety, it seems reasonable to approach each exponent on its own terms, even if there's

little to distinguish a film like *Heli* from, say, Gerardo Naranjo's *Miss Bala*, another bout of Latin American miserablism laced with ferocity and despair. (*Heli* further holds a literary aspiration: the influence of Roberto Bolaño's '2666' looms large.) Mexico has issues; sensationalism is probably not the best way to address them. It seems that the object of Escalante's unblinking nihilism is to illustrate a social reality. But in the end the film illustrates a less significant reality: the astounding self-importance of its director. **CALUM MARSH**

ANTICIPATION. *An award at Cannes was tempered by a cool response from critics.*

2

ENJOYMENT. *A shallow bit of sensationalism meant to endear us more to the director than to the issues at hand.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *No amount of shock-horror tactics can hide the fact that this is paper thin.*

2



Mistaken For Strangers

Directed by **TOM BERNINGER**
 Starring **THE NATIONAL**
 Released **27 JUNE**



REVIEWS

Filmed over the course of US indie kings The National's 2010 Euro arena tour, which followed the release of their acclaimed fifth studio album, 'High Violet', *Mistaken For Strangers* is a profoundly moving and sensationally funny portrait of two brothers masquerading as a warts-n-all rock doc.

It charts the highs and lows of life on the road through the undiscerning lens of frontman Matt Berninger's younger brother, Tom. A shabby manchild/metal head who, according to Matt, "thinks indie rock is pretentious bullshit", Tom is invited to document the band on the biggest headline tour of their career, on the proviso that he work as part of the tour crew. From the outset, it's fairly obvious that Matt invites him more out of sibling obligation than any sudden urge to spend some quality time together, although there's a sense that it will do Tom good to get out of his native Ohio.

Despite agreeing to be on his best behaviour, there's a delightful inevitability about the way Tom shirks his responsibilities in favour of his supposedly incidental film project. It's not long before his backstage antics — he's more interested in casually

necking the band's rider than being a roadie — starts to grate on Matt and the rest of the crew. With each passing show, tensions between Tom, Matt and the band become increasingly strained, and the film spirals poetically (often bittersweetly) towards chaos.

Though he means well and generally comes across as endearingly shambling and affably eccentric on screen, Tom is clearly a perennial pain in the butt to his older brother, a feeling that's most apparent during candid interview sessions in which Tom sincerely poses confounding questions like, "How famous do you think you are?". Yet despite his moody rock star persona, in his own unique way Matt displays a huge amount of love and affection towards Tom, and in doing so he exposes himself in a way that's hyper refreshing in this age of media-trained, social-media savvy celebrity.

Tom's court jester shtick produces some cringe-inducing moments — most memorably a failed attempt to hook up with St Vincent's Annie Clark — but the more his personality comes to the fore, the more honest and truthful *Mistaken For Strangers* becomes. When we learn, through home movie-style interviews with Tom and Matt's mother, that Tom has

always been the black sheep of the family, the film takes on an extra layer of intimacy. The National are five members comprised of two sets of brothers — all Tom has ever really wanted is to belong.

If you're a fan of The National and are sold on the title alone, you'll be pleased to find that music makes up a significant part of the film's scaffolding. This is a band at the top of their game, and in spite of his apparent antipathy towards their songs, it's testament to Tom's unwitting directorial nous that he acknowledges that by leaving so much live footage in. But this is so much more than a film about a band. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *Rock docs are 10-a-penny these days.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *One of the most hilarious, honest films about two brothers you're ever likely to see.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *He might prove to be a one hit wonder, but Berninger has delivered something special.*

4

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Next Goal Wins

Directed by **MIKE BRETT AND STEVE JAMISON**
 Starring **THOMAS RONGEN, JAIYAH SAELUA, NICKY SALAPU**
 Released **2 MAY**

“Football... Bloody hell!” No, not Alan Partridge but the bewildered, rapturous splutterings of former Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson after his team’s last gasp victory over the mighty Bayern Munich in the 1999 Champion’s League final. One-nil down and deep into injury time, United somehow managed to snatch sweet, impish victory from the ruthlessly efficient jaws of defeat, conjuring two goals in just over a minute to steal the game. Bloody hell, indeed.

The problem facing sports documentaries like *Next Goal Wins* is that while no-one expects every real life sporting event to culminate in grandstanding Hollywood heroics, every underdog story must build toward them. As audiences, we have been conditioned to expect that unheralded last-minute win. We know Cinderella will ultimately go to the ball. The question is, how will she get there?

Mike Brett and Steve Jamison’s *Next Goal Wins* joins the American Samoa football team as they approach their qualification campaign for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. To say they are underdogs is an understatement. Having never won a game — and once thumped 31-0 by Australia — they are quite literally the worst football team in the world, sitting

rock-bottom of FIFA’s international rankings. As soon as we see them take the field, it is abundantly clear why.

Desperate to restore the island’s pride with a crucial and historic first win, the American Samoa Football Association (which seems to consist of a single bumbling official) begs help from the US Soccerball authorities, who send over splenetic, swears (and seemingly permanently leathered) Dutch football manager Thomas Rongen.

Formally, the film doesn’t try to reinvent the wheel. There’s no meta-textual fanning around in midfield here, just a careful plodding momentum that guides the ball slowly upfield. That’s not to say this is route-one filmmaking, but despite the exotic trappings of its distant, unspoilt setting, there is something cheerfully familiar about the way the film toils toward the goal.

Not that it’s all plain sailing. The directors take a while deciding who their star players will be. Goalkeeper Nicky Salapu (he of the 31-0 drubbing) and transgender defender Jaiyah “Johnny” Saelua are both given a run out before the arrival of Rongen, a force of nature who grabs both the team and the documentary by the scruff of their necks and refuses to allow

either a moment’s respite until every drop of energy and emotion has been spent.

Next Goal Wins is undoubtedly formulaic and manipulative but it is also a gripping, sweet and unashamedly joyous reminder that it’s not the winning that matters, nor even the taking part, but the coming together for a common purpose, a shared experience. There’s never going to be any storybook outcome when you’re 31 goals down, but — if you don’t weaken — there will always be next time. And where there’s a next time, there’s hope. **ADAM LEE DAVIES**

ANTICIPATION. *Any football film boasting an transgender Samoan defender has to be worth a look.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Back of the net, Jurassic Park and kiss my face. A winner for the loser in all of us.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Slightly muted closing stretch lets the air out of the ball ever so slightly, but by then it’s already in the top corner.*

3

Pulp:

A Film About Life, Death and Supermarkets

Directed by **FLORIAN HABICHT**
Released **6 JUNE**



Spot the odd one out: Ozzy Osbourne biting the head off a bat. Keith Moon smashing up his drum set. Jimi Hendrix setting his guitar on fire. Jarvis Cocker changing a tyre.

The latter is hardly a defining rock'n'roll image, but it's what director Florian Habicht chose to bookend his affectionate but flat portrait of Sheffield's favourite disco pop sons. By his own admission, being a rock star never really suited the Pulp frontman. He's just a common person at heart, you see, one of the Steel City's salt-of-the-earth success stories. Which is all good and well, but there's more to this alt rock icon's four-decade-spanning artistic legacy. Surely?

As the band's longest-serving and most famous member, Cocker's star quality is undeniable here, none more so than on stage

during the band's sell-out farewell show at the Motorpoint Arena. Indeed, Habicht's decision to try to show Cocker in a more natural light backfires — in a few brief talking head segments, he appears stilted and his prompted musings and observations are rarely as profound or poetic as you might expect from one of pop music's great lyricists. The idea is to have Cocker riff on various recurring themes from his songs — sexual frustration, growing old, working class culture — but it feels forced, and the soundbites simply don't flow.

Due to the band's extended hiatus prior to their hometown reunion gig, coupled with their geographical proximity and cult status, it's hard not to compare *Pulp* to Shane Meadows' superior *Made of Stone*. That film boasted a

euphoric energy that Habicht's lacks, but more importantly it put the fans front and centre in a way that felt fresh and exciting. Even if you didn't care for The Stone Roses, it made you understand why others did. In short, it was about something more than the music.

ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. *Cocker and co get the rock doc treatment.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *One for the fans.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Undersells its subject in search of profundity.* **2**

Patema Inverted

Directed by **YOSHIURA YASUHIRO**
Starring **FUJII YUKIYO, OKAMOTO NOBUHIKO, FUKUMATSU SHINYA**
Released **2 MAY**



As a genre which reflects and defamiliarises everyday societal tensions through a glass darkly, dystopian fiction is always inverting the world as we know it. But in Yoshiura Yasuhiro's *Patema Inverted*, the inverted world assumes an unusually literal form.

Curious what lies beyond the underground community she inhabits, Princess Patema (voiced by Fujii Yukiyo) falls down a forbidden shaft and wakes in Aiga, a topsy-turvy land where the biggest danger, besides the constant possibility of plummeting upwards into the sky, is the totalitarian regime determined to eradicate 'Inverts' like herself as 'sinful' abominations. Patema meets an Aigan named Age (Okamoto Nobuhiko) who — like his late father — has always dreamed of flight, and together they try to escape the clutches of Aiga's

tyrannical ruler Izamura (Hashi Takayi), while also getting to the bottom of the long-buried interrelationship between their two worlds.

Patema Inverted flip-flops between two opposed sets of gravity and two contrasting worldviews, while repeatedly switching its visual orientation along a vertical axis so as to leave its characters literally hanging and its viewers never sure which way is up or down. As Patema and Age cling onto each other to avoid falling in either direction, an unusual narrative of empathy, understanding and co-dependence emerges. The reciprocity of their relationship is expressed in the upended 69 position that the two adolescents must adopt to survive together. It's all very innocent, although there is a perverse sexuality in the adult Imamura's sadistic desire to be in absolute control (and on

top) of the much younger Patema.

Aiga's isolationism, xenophobia and self-righteous aggression mirror Japan's own pre-war history, before the nation eventually reached out in more cooperative spirit to the other side of the world. **ANTON BITEL**

ANTICIPATION. *Is Yoshiura Yasuhiro the next Miyazaki?* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *A very new (double) perspective on a familiar tale.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *The disorienting concept is more interesting than the characters.* **3**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

LW Lies meets the Palme d'Or winning Thai director of such modern experimental masterworks as *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and *Syndromes and a Century*, ahead of a small retrospective of his work at London's Anthony Reynolds Gallery.

LW Lies: The general theme of this new show is sleeping. When you made your first video piece in 1998, were you interested in the idea of sleep back then?

Apichatpong: Not really. I'm interested in the different plains of reality. So maybe this is related to sleeping?

Was there ever an event in your life where you physically experienced these separate plains of reality?

I'm not sure. I don't think so. I think that's why I make movies. To make films is to fake these dreams.

Are any of your films literal interpretations of your dreams?

Not really interpretations. More expressions. *Uncle Boonmee* is basically a guy telling us his dream. It's very simple. Very immediate.

Do you write about your dreams?

Yes. Mainly just details. I dream a lot about architecture and landscapes.

Are these real landscapes and buildings or ones you've created in your mind?

I travel to a lot of festivals around the world, so the dreams are basically a mix-up of all these places. I had one dream where I was walking around a city with a friend, and the city is exactly like the one in the movie *Inception*. I could't tell the difference between the dream and reality. I was very confused when I woke up. Dreams are the way you process your memories.

Have you ever been interested in any deeper academic study on sleep and dreams?



No. Just a little bit for the current project that I'm working on. I'm interested in the colour spectrum. I will probably look into this some time soon, though, as I'm doing a show after the next feature I'm making that's going to be a collaboration with a brain scientist. I haven't done any research yet, but all this was inspired by an article I read by an MIT scientist about how certain light can activate certain memories. The new film, called *Cemetery of Kings*, is not this explicit, but it's more about the desire in sleeping. It's a science-fiction movie about artificial light appearing around this group of people. There will be lots of different colour patterns and they are used to make people sleep for different lengths of time.

Will the characters be sleeping for the whole movie?

Most of it. They're awake for a few hours. The main character is one of the people who is infected with this mysterious disease. He's actually the soldier from *Tropical Malady*. I really want to link to the scene in *Tropical Malady* when he is sleeping in the jungle. This new movie is what he's dreaming.

As in *Inception*, will the events which occurred in *Tropical Malady* have any effect on the events of this film?

I don't think so. But there might be a few hints and suggestions.

What stage is the film at?

I'm planning to shoot in September. In two months we will start pre-production.

Will this be your biggest production to date?

No, it will be the smallest. It's really simple. It's also the first film that will be shot in my home town.

What is it like making movies in Thailand?

Of course, you cannot shoot a movie with explicit sex or any criticism of religion or the monarchy. So it's the same taboos we've always worked with.

Do you think the title, *Cemetery of Kings*, could prove problematic?

Maybe, yes. I'm still thinking whether I should literally translate it into Thai when we start shooting. I don't want to have to waste time explaining it to people every time.

What does the title refer to?

Well there's an army hospital which gets too full. So they move these soldiers to an old school. And underneath this school there used to be a cemetery for dead royals. At one point in the film there's a link with the sleepers and the kings and the princes down there.

We have read a lot of articles suggesting this would be in Cannes this year.

Yes, me too! It's so good to be an audience. I'm excited for it too. I really want to see my film. But we must wait. For me, it's like going into battle, even though it's only a few months. It's painful making movies.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Double Visions* runs at the Anthony Reynolds Gallery in London until 17 May



A Touch of Sin

Directed by **JIA ZHANGKE**
 Starring **JIANG WU, LUO LANSHAN, MENG LI**
 Released **9 MAY**

REVIEWS

For more than a decade, Jia Zhangke has been China's most fearless filmmaker. Draconian film censors only emboldened the director by slapping him with a lifetime ban following his second film, 1997's *Xiao Wu*. Then, a series of international successes forced Beijing's cultural guardians to reconsider. Despite being made within the system, *A Touch of Sin* is arguably his most outspoken movie yet.

It's an unflinching and violent ride. In the opening minutes alone, there's a fatal truck crash, an attempted robbery that leaves three dead and an exploding fireball on the horizon. The rapidly rising body count in this full-on opening segment signal that Jia has not so much shifted up a few gears, but is riding on a completely new stretch of road. His signature long, slow pans, a portrait painter's eye for detail and that sense of loneliness in a crowd are still present. But the solitude is now punctuated with violence. One of his protagonists could've walked out of a Tarantino film as he empties his shotgun in front of a village temple. But this is no homage. Like Tarantino, Zhangke is influenced by wuxia martial arts films. Even the title is a nod to King Hu's 1971 Taiwanese wuxia classic *A Touch of Zen*.

But instead of looking back to ancient times, Jia finds lower-class journeymen heroes trying to fight oppressors and find retribution for misdeeds in modern China. Inspired by true stories that only came to light through Weibo (China's answer to Twitter), Jia scratches through the surface of economic miracle headlines to focus on a fissured, fragile and volatile China. *A Touch of Sin* moves through four provinces to look at the stories surrounding four deaths: there's a disgruntled miner whose faith in the system is fraying due to endemic corruption; a silent migrant worker who keeps his living is secret from his family; a young itinerant factory worker whose luck runs out; and a spa receptionist who must fend off an indecent proposal.

"I'll smother you in money," an official says with menace to receptionist Xiao Yu — defining one of the movie's central questions: what is the definition of the term 'cost' in a society where everything is up for sale? Jia picks up themes from his previous films concerning the human struggle against changes set in motion by much larger, unseen, possibly incomprehensible forces. His heroes here are people in various stages of adapting to the new realities of a once communist country that has hit fast forward to ultra-individualism. These are the people who are exploited, cast aside and left behind as businessmen and politicians have become fixated with the race to get rich.

Beyond the social critique, Jia is also making his case for how movies about China ought to be made. In the past, he's criticised other filmmakers, such as Zhang Yimou, director of *Raise the Red Lantern* and the Beijing Olympics Opening ceremony, for shying away from contemporary problems in their films and fleeing into the past.

His contemporaries seem to be listening. This year, the China Film Directors' Guild, the country's equivalent to the Oscars, refused to hand out its two top awards — best picture and best director — in what was widely seen as a protest against censors' refusal to screen *A Touch of Sin*.

"You've picked the wrong time to fight," an official tells coal miner Dahai in the film. But like his heroes in this film, Jia remains defiant and gives it to the censors with both barrels. **D'ARCY DORAN**

ANTICIPATION. *An action film by Jia Zhangke? Hello!*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Jia's world still moves in slow motion. That is until the knives — and guns — come out.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Shocking. Stylish. Historic.*

5





Fading Gigolo

Directed by **JOHN TURTURO**

Starring **SOFÍA VERGARA, SHARON STONE, WOODY ALLEN**

Released **23 MAY**

Like one of Danny Rose's magic acts, fumbling his false passes with a shaved deck of cards at a bar mitzvah, *Fading Gigolo*'s sleight-of-hand is far too clumsy to convince us we're watching a Woody Allen picture, despite the employment of every mis-directional prop available to convince us otherwise. It's not just the presence of Allen himself (giving his most engaged and committed onscreen performance in years) that signifies such ambition. All the inimitable filmmaker's signifying tics and tropes — from setting to score, from heightened concept to narrative economy — are stylistically sweded to tonally approximate a *Crimewatch* reconstruction of *Scoop*.

In *Trespassing Bergman*, the 2013 documentary in which numerous high-profile directors wax lyrical on the Swedish titan, Woody himself says that he's often tried to imitate his idol's work using the exact same lenses and framing, but always found there was something alchemical in the effect Bergman achieved that defied replication. It's a point with which *Fading Gigolo* director, John Turturro, must surely empathise.

While it's no fun to give as beloved a performer as Turturro a kicking, this is his fifth

film as director, and as far as its problems go, the buck in this instance really does stop with him. Most immediately apparent — and most surprising given the musical nature of his previous two features — is the film's sluggish sense of rhythm. Any snap to the dialogue that does occasionally surface, usually as a result of Allen's energised staccato, is undermined by the counter-productive slink of long-time collaborator Marco Pontecorvo's camera. An elegant romanticism is evidently the idea, but so ham-fisted is its basic visual grammar and behind-the-beat editing, that it effects little more than a droning monotony.

The trailer offers as swift a précis of *Fading Gigolo*'s initial set-up as the finished film, borrowing a tendency to ask for plot and character exposition to be taken at face value directly from Woody's noughties pictures. But the Sharon Stone/Sofía Vergara episodes are really less than half the story, with Turturro exchanging broad humour for broad sentimentality and laboured cultural enquiry as his reluctant lothario falls for Vanessa Paradis' Orthodox widow.

One might expect from his own previous films as director — notably 2010's *Passione* and 1998's *Illuminata* — as well as his long-

standing partnership with that other NYC filmmaking stalwart, Spike Lee, that Turturro's engagement with social and cultural anthropology would offer more than a half-baked metaphor over a half-baked fish, but that's sadly not the case, particularly when it comes to his female characters. It doesn't help that where other directors work hard to make a studio back-lot look like New York City, Turturro somehow manages the reverse.

An undercooked mish-mash of the borrowed and fudged, tonally and formally Turturro simply struggles to pull off the balancing act he's going for. Woody might be able to get away a first draft or a first take, but next time Turturro asks him for advice, he might not want to take him at his word when he answers, "Whatever Works". **MATT THRIFT**

ANTICIPATION. A new Woody Allen movie, right?

4

ENJOYMENT. Wrong.

2

IN RETROSPECT. When's Magic in the Moonlight out again?

1



Camille Claudel 1915

Directed by **BRUNO DUMONT**

Starring **JULIETTE BINOCHÉ, MARION KELLER, JEAN-LUC VINCENT**

Released **JUNE 20**

Though there are many sad or disturbing moments in Frederick Wiseman's 1967 documentary, *Titicut Follies*, one that epitomises its central argument is the man who looks directly into the camera and insists that he's not insane, though being institutionalised is making him ill. This sentiment is echoed several times by the titular Camille Claudel (Juliette Binoche), the former student and lover of sculpture Auguste Rodin, who experienced a bout of paranoid schizophrenia at age 48 and was sectioned by her brother Paul (Jean-Luc Vincent).

Despite many campaigns by friends and the advice of doctors that treated her, Paul refused to let her be released for the rest of her life. Assembled from their letters to other people and to each other (much of the dialogue is verbatim), Dumont's consideration of her cruel fate is largely achieved through long takes and many close-ups of Binoche's masterful face. In one scene, while observing two patients (one of whom can barely enunciate) rehearsing a play about Don Juan, Binoche effortlessly transitions from laughing at the absurdity of the exercise to sobbing at the absurdity. Never didactic, the frequent silences allow the audience to run through Camille's thoughts and

feelings with great care — or, just as likely, fidget uncomfortably and hope the film ends soon.

Though Binoche's performance is inextricable from the experience and meaning of *Camille Claudel 1915*, it also explores a series of contrasts: the sane and insane, actors and nonprofessionals, moans and speech, nature and confinement, the punishing and redeeming aspects of faith. On a larger scale, faith and Camille's suffering is also contrasted with modernity at large: though she was institutionalised for the last 30 years of her life, Dumont chooses to dramatise three days in the middle of the Great War, while she was relocated from a Parisian hospital to the Montdevergues Asylum outside of Avignon.

As opposed to the mechanised horror going on not that far away and forever changed politics, warfare, everyday life, and art, the asylum in the film looks like a medieval cathedral and is quiet as a crypt. Camille and her kind exist in a primitive, Spartan stasis outside of that shocking new reality, "treated" with methods that are the antithesis of the progressive or secular — many are not allowed to walk without holding a nun's hand. And, as the film argues, the reasons for her confinement are just as antediluvian: Paul's religious passion is what makes him feel

Camille should remain locked up, as explored in a lengthy monologue with a priest prior to visiting her. After Paul climbs into his Model-T and drives off, the priest is shown in a close-up beaming ghoulishly, which somehow comes off as more disgustingly moralistic than the previous speechifying.

Dumont's commitment to tone and aesthetics is remorseless — this was an injustice, and you will suffer accordingly for 94 minutes. But it's not just suffering for suffering's sake. In our present Huxleyan existence of digital devices, it's just as easy to block out or avoid such a gruelling experience entirely, but it's worth looking into the abyss that was one woman's life. **VIOLET LUCCA**

ANTICIPATION. *Curious to see Dumont and Binoche together.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Binoche is stunning, but this is about as far from enjoyable as you can get.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *Will stay with you for a long time — despite your sanity.*

4



American Interior

Directed by **GRUFF RHYS, DYLAN GOCH**

Starring **GRUFF RHYS**

Released **9 MAY**



The reason the flag of Wales is emblazoned with a big red dragon is that the Welsh are a people whose cultural DNA is suffused with myth and legend. This sentiment is stated by Gruff Rhys, charismatic and lightly bumbling front man of indie pop titans, Super Furry Animals, who has lately opted to dip his toe into the cool stream of the travelogue documentary. *American Interior* is his second, following on from 2010's *Separado!*, and where that first film presented Rhys as a charming, wide-eyed nebbish, hiding behind an over-sized Power Rangers helmet, this one sees him upgrading to unkempt Herzogian buccaneer whose journey is fuelled by the heady vapours of existential wonderment.

Like all good adventure yarns, this one is instigated via a mysterious fax. Rhys was notified of the existence of one John Evans when asked to collaborate with a local fringe theatre production. Evans was a possibly apocryphal 18th century Welsh folk hero of whom there exists very little in terms of finite historical documentation. He was convinced that a Native American who went by the name of Madog was operating a Welsh colony

somewhere on the banks of the Missouri River, and so set sail to America in order to make a connection with this strange outpost.

To make the project financially viable, Rhys scheduled a US tour to follow in Evans' bootprints. Instead of just tumbling through a trad set-list, he created a multimedia showreel in order to present a breathless account of Evans' stupefying and often death-defying galavant. A suave, Muppet-like effigy of Evans is produced in tandem with regular SFA album cover-artist, Pete Fowler, to facilitate a more visual retelling of this tall tale.

There's something beautiful and profound about the concept of Rhys following a guy who followed a guy who (probably) followed a guy before that. The inference being, if we aren't able to muster a basic interest in who we are and where we come from — metaphysically speaking — then what's the point of it all? *American Interior* is a film about storytelling as a form of cultural lifeblood — whether that be through the books, songs, poems, monuments or just a roughhewn patchwork of idle conjecture. Beyond Rhys' search for Evans, the film eventually reveals itself as an examination of the function of stories in

wider society, and that while it may be the gory details that hold our attention, it's their essence and the process of telling which is most vital — an idea that wends its way right back to the Bible.

Yes, it's an amusing and sometimes flippant work, but Rhys' ultimate sincerity is never in question. You watch this delightful and fascinating film with the hope that in 200 years time, the dusty print (or the soiled hard-drive) will be rediscovered in a crumbling archive and some brave soul will opt to make a movie about Gruff Rhys' own foolhardy voyage into the American interior. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Heartening to see that Separado! wasn't a one-off.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Rhys makes for a superb narrator, plus the film gets the best out of a tight budget.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *This is no noodling shaggy dog yarn.*

4

Gruff Rhys

The Welsh music legend and part-time explorer swaps stories of trailblazing high adventure with an eager *LWLies*.

In 2010, Super Furry Animal and all-round good guy Gruff Rhys headed west on a madcap quest to track down a long-lost Patagonian uncle. If *Separado!* felt destined for cult status, Rhys' new adventure and second investigative concert tour, *American Interior*, which comprises a film, album and app, is sure to endear him and co-director Dylan Goch to a wider audience. *LWLies* invited the Welsh troubadour down to our east London HQ to get the skinny on his latest surrealist odyssey.

***LWLies*: This is your second investigative concert tour. How does it differ from the first?**

Rhys: Well, I think there's a bit more to it. The tour was longer and the story has more detail. It was a continuation of what we tried out with *Separado!*, but building on it and trying out different things.

You recorded the album at Mike Mogis' studio in Omaha. Can you talk about that process?

At the start of the tour I had a few songs written, and I carried on finishing them and writing new songs on the tour. The film follows the tour. Halfway through the tour I recorded a large part of the album. It was significant for me to record somewhere that had some kind of significance to the story. I played a show in Omaha, so I went to Mike Mogis' studio there. By this point, Kliph Scullock had joined me on drums. We knocked out about nine songs, and I carried on with the tour.

The film follows John Evans, whose story ends on a bittersweet note. Was that something you were aware of before making the film?

Yeah. I don't want to canonise him necessarily, just document his story and the contradictions

of history. He was looking for a Welsh-speaking tribe that were believed to be roaming the great plains, and he saw that as a way of meeting them and organising an exodus from Wales to America. He wanted to recreate the Welsh nation in the heart of the American continent. But by making the journey, he facilitated the expansion of the USA towards the Pacific. The film is partly about how myths can distort real history, and the kind of danger of following a myth.

Would you be up for having your own History Channel show?

I don't know. I mean, I'm interested in the space between history and fiction, and I like the idea that it could all be made up. It's not, but I like the idea, because I'm not a historian or an academic, that it could maybe present something that happened historically, but without the kind of strict parameters of real history. But then the History Channel's owned by Disney, so maybe it's all fairy tale.

There's a great segment in the film where you visit the Mandan Indians, and meet the

last surviving native speaker of the Mandan language. As someone whose own first language is being increasingly marginalised, what the importance of that meeting for you?

Yeah, well I come from a community that's predominantly Welsh-speaking, in north Wales. When I was in school, out of 100 kids in my year, I think there were three who didn't speak Welsh. I imagine every year since then the percentage who speak Welsh has gone down and down. And so have the communities where Welsh is traditionally spoken in Wales, even though the teaching of the language has increased in other areas overall. The heartlands are finding that the language is increasingly in crisis point.

When John Evans visited the Mandan tribe in 1796, it would have been almost at the height of their civilisation. Their language wasn't under threat. So to go and visit the Mandan tribe today, where there's only one speaker left, kind of hits it home. It's like the physical manifestation of the death of language in a way. In Wales it's easy to kind of forget about it and just enjoy making music and carry on with your life, and, you can see the language is deteriorating, but people lead busy lives and, you know, life's hard enough as it is and everyone doesn't think about it too much.

But then meeting Edwin Benson, who's the last speaker, he's such an enthusiastic guy and he's trying to teach it to younger people, and they're really enthusiastic, and they're looking to the future. It's really inspiring to be around. We didn't want to present him as a cultural full stop.

Why do you think it's so important to protect language?

I think diversity's really important. It just enriches the experience of life for everyone, you know. I think uniformity will make us less able to cover all aspects of knowledge





Ilo Ilo

Directed by **ANTHONY CHEN**

Starring **CHEN TIAN WEN, YEO YANN YANN, LER KOH JIA**

Released **2 MAY**

Perhaps surprisingly given its status as an economic powerhouse, Singapore has never really registered on the world cinema scene. Only a handful of movies produced by the city-state have ever made it on to the major festival circuit, let alone to arthouse screens. But if Anthony Chen's *Ilo Ilo* is anything to go by, we could be seeing the start of a cinematic movement to rival the ones recently seen emerging in Taiwan and South Korea.

The winner of the coveted *Caméra d'Or* — awarded to first-time feature directors — at last year's Cannes Film Festival, *Ilo Ilo* is a semi-autobiographical story set at the height of the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Despite devoted patriarch Teck (Chen Tian Wen) losing his job, the Lim family hire a maid, Teresa (Lav Diaz veteran Angeli Bayani), to help the mother, Leng Hwee (Yeo Yann Yann), as the arrival of their second child fast approaches. Their 10-year-old son, Jiale (Ler Koh Jia), is already a troublemaker, and acts out as soon as Teresa moves in. But eventually the pair form a bond, one by which Jiale's mother feels increasingly threatened.

Really, though, Chen is more interested in the people than the plotting: his excellent screenplay, delivered in a low-key docudrama style, veers away from contrivance and melodrama to create a slice of life with a genuine feel for family politics and local culture, deftly and subtly revealing a little more about his subjects and the way they live their lives with every scene.

The relationship between Teresa and Jiale is at the film's heart, and we see the boy as good-hearted but with tearaway tendencies, while the maid mourns the child she left behind and isn't going to stand for any nonsense. Together they form a strong mother/son bond that has a few layers of 'something' more on top.

But the filmmaker is equally adept in his portrait of a marriage, and like Bayani and Koh Jia, Yann Yan and Tian Wen are both great in presenting the very real pressures of a lower-middle-class marriage and trying to survive the financial pressures stinging hard. While everyone involved can behave terribly at times, Chen's lens is compassionate and humane throughout, with Mike Leigh and Asghar Farhadi among

the more obvious comparison points.

And the young director isn't just a whiz with actors — the film's bright, clean look (courtesy of DoP Benoit Soler) and disarmingly abrasive editing suggest that he's got real filmmaking know-how. Occasionally, a wrong turn is taken: sub-plots involving Jiale's obsession with lottery numbers and the mother's involvement with a self-help guru don't quite gel with the whole. But otherwise, this is a hugely confident and well-executed first feature that certainly marks Chen out as one to watch in the future. **OLIVER LYTTELTON**

ANTICIPATION. *A clutch of prizes on the festival circuit bodes well.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Compassionate, beautifully acted and wryly funny.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *One of the more impressive feature debuts in recent memory. Anthony Chen is a director to watch.*

4



Omar

Directed by **HANY ABU-ASSAD**
 Starring **ADAM BAKRI, LEEM LUBANY, IYAD HOORANI**
 Released **MAY 30**

Omar (Adam Bakri) is a baker in the West Bank and secretly involved in anti-Israeli resistance with old pals Tarek (Iyan Hoorani) and Amjad (Samer Bisharat). He is infatuated with Tarek's beautiful sister, Nadia (Leem Lubany), also furtively. To steal a few heated moments and exchange detailed love letters with her, he regularly scales the wall between Israel and Palestine, out-maneuvering soldiers who often pursue him through a labyrinth of dusty streets. Adam Bakri is a sculpted powerhouse of youthful energy with eyes that burn with passion. He looks the part of a character physically defined by staying ahead of enemies while emotionally alight with love.

Yet this taxing palaver marks the simplest point in Omar's arc. Following the death of an Israeli soldier he is pulled in for 'questioning' of the painful, *Zero Dark Thirty* variety. He's asked to become an informant, with the prospect of damage to Nadia rolled out as a repellant bargaining chip. Director Hany Abu-Assad has form in exploring the interplay between conflicts of the personal and political variety. His 2005 film *Paradise Now* focused on two Palestinians recruited for a suicide bombing mission and the flurry

of quotidian issues this entailed. *Omar*, with its simple title, works to repeatedly pull focus back to the man caught between betraying his cause and betraying his love. Such a thankless conundrum would make a wretched mess out of anyone, and Abu-Assad lets the wearing implications of the situation form the understated emotional core of this impressive thriller.

A taut script and an intricate plot form the structure against which Omar's dilemma is strained. Everyone has secrets and violence is never far away, even between friends. Omar, Tarek and Amjad are a fascinating trio whose precarious personal agendas have a way of upsetting their camaraderie. Jokey exchanges turn menacing at the same head-spinning speed as between volatile Mafioso buds in *Goodfellas*. If there's nothing as heightened as Joe Pesci's "Funny how?" speech, it's because characters are too stressed for theatrics. Abu-Assad and his cast create a sense of peril and unpredictability born out of conflicted situations rather than amorality.

The director is minimal but effective with his use of personal details. A prison conversation between Omar and a sympathetic Israeli captor is interrupted by a call from the

captor's wife. She can't pick their daughter up from school. Cue the captor calling his mother who has views on the wife's mothering. This small domestic interference seems incongruous but has meaning by the final shot of the film.

As for the love story, it plays out without a drop of schmaltz. How do you keep faith in romance when everything in life is falling apart? Abu-Assad's greatest achievement is to give casualties to the heart the same weight as more physical blows. It makes the blood flowing through this political drama a deeper shade of red. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Love and informing in a war zone? Sounds like stapled-together genres.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Abu-Assad cares about his characters and their wretched but thrilling situations.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *'Omar' is derived from the Arabic for 'flourishing', a powerful and intentional irony.*

4



An Autumn Afternoon (1962)

Directed by YASUJIRÔ OZU

Starring CHISHÛ RYÛ, SHIMA IWASHITA, KEIJI SADA

Released 16 MAY

Things slip away in the films of Yasujirô Ozu, and so it goes with 1962's *An Autumn Afternoon*, the Japanese master's final film, and maybe the last word in movies about loss. What disappears here is no less devastating for being so everyday: the film is about a widower reluctantly pushing his daughter into marriage, a gesture that will leave him alone in the end. But beginning with its first unsightly industrial image of smoke stacks rising into the sky, it's also about the changes taking place in Japan in the 1960s — a wide-scale transformation that doesn't leave much in its wake.

At this point, talking about Ozu's style is itself a kind of formality: like most of the director's dramas, *An Autumn Afternoon* is gentle and stately. Never a pushy filmmaker, Ozu was nevertheless peerless at manoeuvring viewers into positions of empathy and identification with his characters, and it doesn't take long before we're drawn into the plight of Mr Hirayama (Chishû Ryû), who has been such a good father to thirtysomething Michiko (Shima Iwashita) that she's stayed close to home — a domestic situation that carries its share of stigma. Michiko's daughterly doting

marks her as a very traditional woman, but Hirayama fears that her devotion will turn into its own kind of trap.

Michiko's future is uncertain; by contrast, Hirayama's past is so familiar that he clings to it as a ritual. The scenes where he drunkenly carouses with his middle-school buddies suggest a group of men simultaneously liberated and ensnared by shared experience. Their joy at reliving adolescence together is tempered by the sense that they haven't travelled very far in the intervening years. Relics and reminiscences keep piling up, while time marches forward in the other direction. The society on display in *An Autumn Afternoon* is sleekly modernised, and yet despite all the bright colours and the clutter of consumer objects (a sub-plot involves the purchase of a brand-new refrigerator), Ozu isn't satirising this situation; rather, he's drawing a parallel between the upheaval of a single household haunted by the fallout of World War II and that of an entire country.

Ryû, who played the patriarch in Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, is superb in a role that at once evokes and complicates the earlier film. This time, instead of a man who's gently ignored by

his adult children, he's playing someone who takes his daughter's presence for granted and who grows increasingly troubled by that fact. Critics sometimes tend to treat Ozu's actors as props within his precise camera set-ups, but *An Autumn Afternoon* has numerous vivid performers, including Akira Kurosawa alum Eijirô Tono as 'The Gourd', a wizened, elderly academic who emerges as a cautionary tale for Hirayama; it's only after seeing his former professor in such a state of disarray that he begins to make arrangements for Michiko — a powerful statement about how we never really stop measuring ourselves against the people we admire in our youth.

ADAM NAYMAN

ANTICIPATION. *The tilting swansong of one of cinema's masters.*

5

ENJOYMENT. *This may be heartbreak by stealth, but it's no less harrowing and beautiful for it.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *Among Ozu's — and cinema's — greatest works.*

5



A Farewell To Arms (1932)

Directed by **FRANK BORZAGE**

Starring **GARY COOPER, HELEN HAYES, ADOLPHE MENJOU**

Released **30 MAY**

Hemingway thought Fitzgerald ought to be ashamed of the confessional essays he wrote about his “Crack-Up”, but the latter understood why. “He is quite as nervously broken down as I am,” Scott wrote of Ernest in a letter to a friend, “but it manifests itself in different ways. His inclination is toward megalomania and mine toward melancholy.” Indeed, Hemingway’s famously clenched sentences have the willed stoicism of a father holding back tears in front of his children. *A Farewell to Arms* sees Papa kill off a character based on the nurse who jilted him when he was a teenaged ambulance driver, recasting a formative crush as a casualty of the First World War. So, contrary to appearances as well as Hemingway’s own skepticism, melodrama maestro Frank Borzage proved a perfectly suited adaptor for the then-recent bestseller, seeing past Hemingway’s forefronted masculinity to forge a febrile, expressive romantic tragedy.

Gary Cooper, later a hunting buddy of Hemingway’s, is the author’s ideal surrogate, Frederic Henry. He’s detached from war but not frightened of it, with a sexual confidence shading definitively into tenderness once he meets nurse Catherine Barkley, played by Helen Hayes with the sort of dancing, murmuring voice that actresses of the ’30s and ’40s always used to

convey sexual receptivity. Both actors bring a surprising mix of innocence and experience to the seduction scene, which Borzage fades out on and cuts away from multiple times, condensing an entire courtship of parry-and-thrust, surrender, guilt, defiance and discovery into a single sequence. The narrative is driven by their consuming sexual desire, as the two are reunited and sundered, by the fortunes of war and the interventions of Henry’s jealous “war brother”, Rinaldi (Adolphe Menjou), as unapologetic in their defiance of military protocol as the film is in its workarounds of the then-teething Production Code.

Borzage makes no effort to cheat around the foot-plus difference in height between his stars — facing Hayes in two-shots, Coop’s back arches solicitously, like a question mark—though the two are more frequently horizontal. Cinematographer Charles Lang’s diffused, almost numinous lighting scheme makes their faces quiver. (Lang won the Oscar, his only win on the second of 18 nominations spanning five decades.)

Much of the film’s final third is given over to wild montage, conveying the horrors of war through expressionistic mise-en-scène and symbolic bombardment. The ending is Wagnerian, featuring a white bedsheet as both

bridal train and burial shroud, the peeling of church bells and the flight of white doves. But the most effective of Borzage’s flourishes comes earlier, after Henry is wounded in an air raid. Borzage and Lang stage long takes from Henry’s POV as he’s carried, immobile, on a stretcher, the scroll of a hospital ceiling interrupted as faces hover into view — and then Cathy, swanning in for a kiss, coming so close to the lens that everything goes blurry. Borzage effaces his leading man completely — what must Hemingway have thought? — the better to conflate passion and passivity, and you’re borne right along. **MARK ASCH**

ANTICIPATION. *A new restoration is welcome, as Borzage’s reputation still lags behind his talents.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Maybe closest we’ll ever get to a movie of ‘If You Were the Only Girl (In the World)’.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Fills in the space around Hemingway’s prose with a doomed sense of romance.*

4

Advanced Style

Directed by **LINA PLIOPLYTE**
Released **9 MAY**



Meet Ilona Royce Smithkin, a nonagenarian with immaculate comic timing. She's a talented portraitist who once painted Ayn Rand, but quips that she's getting too old to take a chance on buying "green bananas" any more. Or why not navigate New York with Jacquie "Tajah" Murdock, now 81 and one of the original dancers at the Apollo Theatre who still dreams of meeting her ideal man? Or hang out with quirky 67-year-old artist, Debra Rapoport, whose fascination with bespoke apparel makes her a striking standout on the street. Then there's brash Lynn Dell Cohen, owner of vintage mainstay, Off Broadway Fashion, who cuts an imposing figure and isn't afraid to speak her mind.

In Lina Plioplyte's delightful documentary, fashion, once solely the preserve of high-

cheekboned Amazonian waifs, comes full circle, as here a gaggle of wrinkled, winsome women take centre stage. Based on the blog (then book) by Ari Seth Cohen, *Advanced Style* brims with a spirit and indefatigable optimism that's difficult not to find endearing. When a recent arrival to New York, Cohen began taking pictures of some of the most stylish elderly ladies the Big Apple had to offer. High fashion soon followed, with campaigns and recognition from the likes of fashion go-tos Vogue, Lanvin and Karen Walker, as well as vast media coverage elsewhere.

Yet while fashion may be the lingua franca of Plioplyte's film, you won't need to bone-up to enjoy this incredibly warm and life-affirming film. In fact, you might argue that, despite its often po-faced subject matter, the film works best as a

comedy. His elderly entourage are genuine, silver-tongued stars. In an industry that values youth above all else, you've got to doff your cap to these elegantly trussed-up ladies. They have mettle and style in abundance and have tightened their belts against encroaching age with an uncommon grace. **CORMAC O'BRIEN**

ANTICIPATION. *What's the fashion forecast?*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Sweet, funny and very, very New York.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Accumulated charm.*

4

The Golden Dream

Directed by **DIEGO QUEMADA-DÍEZ**
Starring **BRANDON LÓPEZ, KAREN MARTÍNEZ, RODOLFO DOMÍNGUEZ**
Released **27 JUNE**



The sun-kissed wheat fields in Diego Quemada-Díez's debut feature conjure an affirmative tale aglow with friendship, natural beauty and nuggets of coming-of-age wisdom. *The Golden Dream* concerns Guatemalan teenagers who strike out cross-country towards the promised land of America. It could have been a South American *Stand By Me*, political undercurrents neatly packaged as a token adversity against which the real emotional development unfolds.

But Mexican director Quemada-Díez has worked as cameraman on three Ken Loach films and counts the British social realist as an influence. Take the title as a sardonic update of *The American Dream*, and you will be better equipped for the hard knocks in store.

We meet the trio of non-actors who play Juan

(Brandon López), Sara (Karen Martínez) and Samuel (Carlos Chajon) as they are packing up and shipping out of their slum town. It's a brief process involving money snatched out of jean pockets and, in Sara's case, lock-chopping and boob-binding as she reinvents herself as a boy. This is the first hint that where they're headed is no country for young women.

The Golden Dream is preoccupied with what happens out in the ungoverned no-man's-land en route to the border. Events are filmed in a quiet, documentary style, natural surroundings filling in for dialogue. The sound of trains rat-a-tat-ing along the tracks and arches of light that recede as transportation gets deeper into a tunnel recur and linger as an over-flogged metaphor for losing sight of the past. Rather than being a plot or character-driven story, this is a mood piece that doesn't

quite achieve greatness. It is assembled from a mash-up of 600 real-life attempted immigration stories, and as corrupt officials, violent bandits and personal losses start to erode the dreams that caused our young heroes to initially sally forth, the impact of their tragedies feel unsatisfyingly muted. **SOPHIE MONKSKAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Cannes held it in *Un Certain Regard*.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Unsentimental, understated, underdeveloped.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *A watercolour nightmare.*

2

Cheap Thrills

Directed by **EL KATZ**

Starring **PAT HEALY, ETHAN EMBRY, SARA PAXTON**

Released **6 JUNE**



There's more to this whip-smart debut feature by EL Katz than Faustian pacts and bacchanalian excess. The writer-director presents a vision of a vampiric world, rotten and corrupt, ripping itself apart for the sake of a few lousy bucks.

The story takes place over a wild and woozy evening. Healy plays Craig, a family man and mechanic who loses his job at the local garage. On the way home from his final shift, he stops by a rather salubrious-looking drinking den in order to drown his sorrows. He bumps into his old pal Vince (Ethan Embry), as well as a mysterious and curiously wealthy couple (the terrific Sara Paxton and *Anchorman* sidekick David Koechner, who can do smarmy in his sleep). As the booze flows, and his defences

collapse, Craig finds himself enticed into a sinister series of dares that will guarantee his financial security. All of this at an unthinkable personal cost.

Cheap Thrills is a mischievous, increasingly outrageous yarn that's not afraid to put its protagonists — and the audience — through the ringer. At times, the film feels like a modern, scabrously violent take on a Richard Matheson teleplay, or a Roald Dahl mystery. The production occasionally betrays its budget. Focus issues, for instance, consistently distract, drawing attention to the artifice of the drama. But there are some nice touches — check out the changing colour palette, as the movie switches from debauchery into dread.

There are echoes of other 'one night

stands' like *After Hours* or *Quick Change*, and like those films, this revels in escalating peril and social disorder, and Katz is sure to give us a whole lot of darkness before the dawn.

CHRIS BLOHM

ANTICIPATION. *Horror fans have been in a tizzy about this one for ages.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *A savage banquet, with wickedness on tap.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Cheap Thrills delivers, but can it break out of the genre ghetto?* **3**

The Two Faces of January

Directed by **HOSSEIN AMINI**

Starring **KIRSTEN DUNST, VIGGO MORTENSEN, OSCAR ISAAC**

Released **16 MAY**



Fresh off the back of his breakthrough lead turn in the Coen brothers' glorious folk ballad, *Inside Llewyn Davis*, Oscar Isaac keeps his feet firmly in the '60s in this Patricia Highsmith adaptation directed by *Drive* screenwriter Hossein Amini.

Swapping Greenwich Village for Greece, Isaac plays Rydal, a smouldering American tour guide who uses his extensive knowledge of ancient Athenian architecture to bed doe-eyed travellers. On top of being a womaniser, he's also something of a schemer, which comes in handy when he becomes entangled in a particularly sticky ménage à trois with suave con artist Chester MacFarland (Viggo Mortensen) and his beautiful wife Colette (Kirsten Dunst).

Despite fleeing to sunnier climes, dark clouds quickly gather over Chester as his dodgy

dealings back home catch up with him. No sooner has his cover been blown than he and the unwitting Rydal are bundling a dead PI down a laundry chute, leaving our mysterious young expat with a tricky dilemma: does he hand Chester in to the circling authorities right away, or wait until he's had a fair crack at his missus? This being a Patricia Highsmith story, you can guess which way the dial on his moral compass swings.

It's all a little too in love with its own sun-bleached period aesthetic, but as sophisticated Mediterranean suspense thrillers go, *The Two Faces of January* is a gilded guilty pleasure. The film's scintillating three-way chemistry is especially irresistible — in particular Isaac and Mortensen share an intriguing father-son dynamic that simmers away beneath a surface of

chess-like foreplay. This is a film that plays to its strengths well, and while Amini never struggles to get to grips with his source material, there's surely more to come from him as a director.

ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. *From the writer of The Talented Mr. Ripley. And the writer of Drive.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *Lesser Highsmith, but Mortensen, Isaac and Dunst are a joy to watch.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *We'll be hotly awaiting Hossein Amini's next.* **3**



36

Directed by **NAWAPOL THAMRONGRATTANARIT**
 Starring **VAJRASTHIRA KORAMIT, WANLOP RUNGKAMJAD**
 Released **6 JUNE**



REVIEWS

“We might have a problem with time,” suggests Oom (Wanlop Rungkamjad), an art director visiting a building for a the pre-production of a film shoot. “If we have to set up at night, we might have trouble with the owner.”

Oom and location scout Sai (Vajrasthira Koramit) spend some time hanging out together at a series of potential sets for a film. Sai takes a large number of (mostly) work-related photos with her digicam, while Oom, who does not like to be photographed himself, snaps the odd shot with an old-fashioned analogue camera for his private collection.

Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit’s feature debut *36* borrows its title and structure from the number of exposures in a conventional full-length film roll for a camera like Oom’s — even if, paradoxically, *36* has been shot digitally. The film’s first 11 takes, each coming with its own heading like a photograph in an album, document Oom’s and Sai’s developing relationship. The remaining 25 (also labelled) follow Sai two years after she has parted company with Oom. Asked to find a suitable location to match her director’s boyhood memories of a now demolished clinic, Sai

discovers that her digital files from 2008 have been corrupted, and that she has lost all her photographs from that period, whether of buildings or of Oom.

Thamrongrattanarit and his DoP Khumwan Pairach take an oblique, decentred approach to what they record, keeping their characters either to the edge or even out of frame and leaving viewers to reconstruct events, even as Sai half-heartedly attempts to recover her own digital archive. It is a melancholic pursuit of memory and meaning, set mostly in empty, abandoned spaces where history can only be reimaged or reappropriated. It’s hardly a coincidence that we learn, in a casual aside, that Sai once studied archaeology — she is still excavating the ‘place with a past’ for traces of lost feelings and half-recalled experiences. That several of the buildings where the film was shot have since been destroyed and replaced with condominiums makes *36* itself a psychogeographic repository, its fictions temporarily renewing the life of places now otherwise confined to the ghosts.

The “problem with time” that Oom foresees is in fact the key theme of *36*. Here

everything is ephemeral, the future is always different from the past, and even the medium itself, whether film or digital, is an unstable and inexact haunt for human longings. Yet far from being a mere lament, the film is also a celebration of the way that we make, borrow or even steal our own memories, no matter how shaky their foundations. And at a mere 68 minutes, Thamrongrattanarit’s 36 discontinuous scenes of change in a woman’s life are, for all their elliptical brevity, carefully paced to carry the full weight of time’s passing. The results are a whimsical yet wise catalogue of once lived-in rooms onto which Thamrongrattanarit invites us to project our own sense of nostalgia. **ANTON BITEL**

ANTICIPATION. *Nawapol who?*

3

ENJOYMENT. *36 snapshots of time, memory and loss.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit. Store that name in your mind’s hard drive.*

5

Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit



Up-and-coming Thai writer-director Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit's extraordinary features *36* and *Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy* explore love and loss in the digital age. *LW Lies* interviewed him via his natural medium — Twitter.

@AntBit summarise *36* in a tweet

@ter_nawapol *36* is a love story in digital era. our love and memory are all contained in the haddisk.

@AntBit did any particular films influence *36*?

@ter_nawapol not by films but it's influenced by the concept of a film roll. *36* is number of shots in 35mm film for still camera.

@AntBit is the framing of (often off-centre) characters also an imitation of the casually captured reality of analogue snapshots?

@ter_nawapol yes indeed. i'm more interested in what is happening off-frame.

@AntBit so you are getting your viewers to reconstruct and recover (lost) meaning?

@ter_nawapol yes. it's all abt reconstructing the memory like Lego. audience can recreate their own story from *36* non-continuous shots.

@AntBit Sai is a location scout (& ex-archaeologist). How does location & the 'place with a past' fit into *36*'s conception?

@ter_nawapol when i visit places [esp. old place] i always feel of the memory which is left behind, through the object, the stain on the wall

@AntBit it reminds me of the past, the owner who ever lives here.

@ter_nawapol In thailand nowadays, the new condo is rising and replacing lots of old places without preservation from the government

@ter_nawapol without photo, sometimes we can't remember them. they are disappeared so fast.

@AntBit *36* is shot digitally, but highlights that format's flaws as a storage medium. Do you lament or celebrate the death of film?

@ter_nawapol i don't lament or celebrate. i just accept it. it's the nature of everything. change.

@AntBit summarise *MARY IS HAPPY, MARY IS HAPPY* in a tweet #challenge #metatweet

@ter_nawapol it's a film about tweets. #metaandmetatweet

@AntBit how did you discover your tweeter @marylony? Did you know her in person, or just chance upon her tweets?

@AntBit i randomly choose the subject out of my twitter followers. luckily, i found her. very happy. hope @marylony is happy too.

@AntBit & how careful were you in selecting her 410 consecutive tweets? Was it an entirely random choice?

@ter_nawapol 1st tweet started on the day i got accepted for biennale college workshop, the last tweet on the day of selected project announcem

@AntBit your film's desultoriness, hyperbole, streams of consciousness & mood swings — is it teen spirit? twitter spirit? both?

@ter_nawapol both. when i had idea about twitter film, i thought it must be a film about teenager.

@AntBit loss, longing, absence & melancholy haunt your films — but they're also playful & funny. How did you balance serious & comic?

@ter_nawapol basically i like black comedy. i love looking at the reality with sense of humour. Actually Thailand is good resource of blackcomedy

@AntBit *36* shots, tweets. Ultimately are the Lars von Trier-like 'obstructions' that you impose upon yourself artistically liberating?

@ter_nawapol it's not liberating but it makes me under the obstructions and rules i like.

@AntBit what's next?

@ter_nawapol Thai mainstream film with the studio. my new obstruction. Haha 🤔



Belle

Directed by AMMA ASANTE

Starring GUGU MBATHA-RAW, MATTHEW GOODE, EMILY WATSON

Released 13 JUNE

From the films of Merchant-Ivory through *Upstairs, Downstairs* and *Downton Abbey*, British entertainment has a proud history of investigating the frequently unspoken social codes and peculiar class constructs which have long distinguished this scepter'd isle. In *Belle* — Amma Asante's follow-up to *A Way of Life* (a powerful social realist drama from 2004) — a further vexing factor is thrown into the mix: race. While Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* took an unsparing look at the harrowing realities of US slavery, this situates itself at the cusp of major change in British society — 1769, when the wheels of abolition were just being set in motion.

Belle is the fictionalised version of the true story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, the mixed-race daughter of British naval officer John Lindsay (played fleetingly by Matthew Goode) and an enslaved African woman (who goes unseen). In the opening moments Lindsay visits the palatial Kenwood House estate to entrust the care of young Dido to Lord Mansfield (Tom Wilkinson), who also happens to be the highest judge in the land. Here, though welcomed into the fold, a perplexed Dido finds herself too high in rank to dine with the servants, but too low in status, on account of her skin colour, to dine with her family. "Am I not wealthy?", she questions, plaintively, but her pleas are met with well-meaning obfuscation and double-talk by her ostensibly sympathetic family.

It is Dido's material wealth which piques the interest of vulture-like Lady Ashford (a dependably horrible Miranda Richardson), who wants to set the girl up with her son, the nice-but-dim Lord Ashford (Alex Jennings). Matters are complicated by the presence of hunkily idealistic trainee lawyer John Davinier (Sam Reid, who, mercifully, gets less wooden as the film progresses). Davinier sets about stealing Dido's heart, but he's got bigger plans, namely persuading Lord Mansfield to do the right thing in his judgement of the shameful Zong boat massacre, in which approximately 142 enslaved Africans were killed. When Dido gets wind of the Zong situation, her stirring ascension to the position of unlikely activist begins.

As indicated by the inclusion of the horrific Zong incident as a central narrative hook, *Belle* deals with some pretty weighty themes. Yet Asante does a tremendous job of balancing this painful history with gossamer-light, humane observation of her milieu and its characters. Crucially, she also nails the blossoming love story at the film's centre. Asante is aided by terrific performances from a large ensemble cast (Wilkinson in particular stands out as the conscientious patriarch who must face down some uncomfortable truths regarding the roots of his own privilege), a witty script, and fluid, crystalline digital photography by Ben Smithard who, having shot Simon Curtis' *My Week with Marilyn*, has good form with

prestige period pictures.

Yet perhaps the film's most impressive achievement is the creation, in Dido, of a refreshingly unorthodox feminist heroine for a new generation. It doesn't matter a jot that this story is centuries old: these issues are timeless. Embodied by Gugu Mbatha-Raw — whose raw-nerve, pool-eyed turn should ensure she becomes a breakout star — Dido is a young woman who constantly questions the societal structure surrounding her, painstakingly deconstructs the perception of her identity in the jaundiced eyes of others; and pursues what she wants — in this case justice, equality, and an emotionally satisfying, balanced romantic relationship. In its own understated way, as Dido bravely calls the shots in her own life, *Belle* contains more punch-the-air moments than a bunch of summer blockbusters combined.

ASHLEY CLARK

ANTICIPATION. *British cinema's first mixed-race heroine? Yes please!*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Grips from minute one, and wears its heavy themes lightly.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *A supremely confident work from one of Britain's most promising directors.*

4

On Set... With Jacques Gites

Dispatch Number Two: *Jurassic Park*
Pinewood, May 1992

One evening at Lausanne 1970, the year of that film festival's infamous mass walk-out over Alan Alda's personality, I sat by the lake at sunset enjoying a tiny, brightly coloured drink with an unknown filmmaker whose dream it was to make the greatest monster movie of all time. I smiled at the idea. I'd seen first-hand how difficult it was to make a real world-beater such as *The Valley of Gwangi*. Yet I had to admire his nerve. Little did I know then, he would become a great friend of mine and that, before the decade was out, he would achieve his ambition. He was, of course, Geoff Tressell, second-unit miniatures director on *Empire of the Ants*, and the man who made that film an inspiration for the next generation of cinematic scarifiers.

It was Geoff who greeted me one spring day at Pinewood Studios in 1992, where all the outdoor scenes were being shot for Steve Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* — a dinosaur disaster movie based almost entirely on Geoff's formicine masterpiece and on Michael Crichton's novel 'Jurassic Park'.

In a fleet of garish golf carts, we embarked on our tour of a facility that, until then, had been a closely guarded secret. But thanks to my longstanding relationship with Steve Spielberg, and to Geoff, I was one of a select few chosen to tell the world about an exciting new kind of film made largely out of computers. With me was Andreja Levska



from *Kino Optik* magazine, who was writing 18,000 words on prehistoric imperialism in European cinema, and Max Hastings from *The Telegraph*, who wanted to find out what the re-animation of long-dead species could mean for British farmers.

The vast soundstage which awaited us was breathtaking: an entire island had been constructed by the all-British crew, which, to put it in a context everyone can understand, could have accommodated eight Primrose Hills with extra room for the nice bit of Maida Vale. It was

here that the mighty T-Rex would roam once more, although at the time of my visit the only foretaste of that magic was a 12-year-old boy called Andy Circus prancing around wearing a leotard with tennis balls sewn to it. For me, the real thrill of the day came later, when we witnessed, from behind the safety of a plexiglass wall, Mike Crichton being interviewed by a literary critic who had been tethered to a tree. Savage nature.

Years later, as Steve and I knocked back the Amaro Montenegro at Venice, I found out that he and Mike had killed off one character in the film who had survived in the novel. It seems Donald Gennaro, who gets bitten in half while soiling himself on the lavvy, was bumped off simply because his superior air, and his spectacular lack of self-awareness, reminded the boys of a particularly irritating member of our party. Poor old Max! No wonder he became a war correspondent.

I never bothered seeing *Jurassic Park*, which seemed like a rather unlikely story to me. But this was the '90s, after all, when you could leave any Hollywood hotshot's cabana with a fat contract and a Pearl Jam CD signed by David Geffen simply by saying "I want to make a film that is both a critique of ecologically irresponsible consumerism and the basis for a highly lucrative range of merchandising". In today's climate, that movie simply wouldn't get made 🐦

Fruitvale Station

Directed by **RYAN COOGLER**
 Starring **MICHAEL B JORDAN,**
MELONIE DIAZ, OCTAVIA SPENCER
 Released **6 JUNE**



There's an old Hollywood dictum which states, don't shoot the puppy. With his debut feature film, writer-director Ryan Coogler does not simply shoot the puppy, he shoots two puppies. The first is literal, a stray mutt that gets smashed to bits when it haplessly strides into the fast lane. The second is figurative, an ex-con named Oscar (Michael B Jordan) who is the film's Old Yeller. Coogler spends a good 90 minutes petting and prodding and hugging and ruffling his hair before mercilessly putting him under the gun. Essentially a remake of Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible*, but reversed, *Fruitvale Station* is an exercise in sentimental histrionics and battering-ram manipulation, with the moral of the story being, you're never too lovable to get whacked. Try, if you might, to choke back the inevitable tears brought

on by the climactic 20 minutes, but these are tears which have been earned via crooked means.

We join Oscar at the point where a new leaf has been turned. Prison has taught him a lesson, and instead of making a quick buck on a monster weed sale, he's emptying the package into the wind so he can spend more quality time with his adoring wife and child. His violent past is used purely as a counterpoint to make this avuncular "changed man" appear all the more appealing. The wistful naturalism of the performance makes the melodrama easier to swallow, but the film as a whole comes across as a parody of those war films where you hear a wide-eyed private proclaim how much he's looking forward to seeing his wife and unborn child before embarking on a mission code named "Total Annihilation".

Coogler seems desperate to paint Oscar as a saint. If this brash film is part of a political protest to bring Oscar's killer to justice, it might have done more to muddy the fine details of the case.

DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. *Good buzz from last year's Sundance.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *Just... no. This is heartstring-tugging hokey.* **2**

IN RETROSPECT. *A technically strong, but also a dishonest piece of filmmaking.* **2**

Sabotage

Directed by **DAVID AYER**
 Starring **ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER,**
SAM WORTHINGTON,
TERRENCE HOWARD
 Released **7 MAY**



Since his return to acting following an eight-year political sojourn, movie fans have been crying out for a serious Arnold Schwarzenegger performance. Now, after tediously cosy cameos in the *Expendables* franchise, pulpy border patrol romp *The Last Stand* and chummy prison-break throwback *Escape Plan*, that moment has finally arrived. But was it worth the wait? Well, yes and no. Because while *Sabotage* boasts the best of post-hiatus Arnie, *Training Day* writer and *End of Watch* director David Ayer fails to deliver.

The film opens with an elite DEA task force, led by Schwarzenegger's no-nonsense commander, "Breacher", storming a drug cartel stronghold to recover several palette-fulls of dirty bunce. Not content with the satisfaction of a good day's work, the team stashes \$10m down a toilet pipe with the view to splitting it later. Upon returning

to retrieve their commission, however, they discover that the money is missing. This sets off a chain of increasingly barbaric acts of retaliation and double-crossing, as Breacher fails to keep his mercenary crew from self-implosion.

End of Watch was a gritty and compelling inverted buddy cop thriller that dropped us into a world that felt scarily authentic. It provided a visceral and unflinching look at daily LAPD life that approached its subject with a degree of sensitivity without pulling any punches. By comparison, *Sabotage* is a crude fracas of frothing testosterone and second-hand banter. It presents us with a group of vulgar toughs who revel in misogyny and gratuitous violence and asks us to idly comply with their sadistic pantomime.

Arnie is the film's shining light, but even his character is a nasty piece of work. Despite a

sympathy-bating subplot concerning the horrific torture and murder of his wife, Breacher's redemptive arc leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Ayer's problem is that he doesn't give us a single character to invest in. So while the frenzied set pieces are impressively executed, you'll come away feeling all these guts were spilled for nothing.

ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. *He's back.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *David Ayer's worldview is disagreeably bleak.* **2**

IN RETROSPECT. *This is ugly, unpleasant filmmaking.* **2**

The Canyons

Directed by **PAUL SCHRADER**

Starring **LINDSAY LOHAN, JAMES DEEN, NOLAN GERARD FUNK**

Released **9 MAY**



Paul Schrader's *The Canyons* became a miniature cause célèbre due to its cranky funding methods and the swathes of tittle-tattle reportage that emerged from the set. It's clear that most parties saw the film's bizarre genetic make-up as its most saleable asset, and the final product itself appeared as something of an unwanted byproduct. Except while most were busy trading BuzzFeed shortcodes and snickering at sparky porn star James Deen's Special Performance Technique, they neglected to engage with the movie that had been made. Which is actually rather good.

Possessing the same sly satirical bite as Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls*, Schrader's film is all the more effective for it being so closely tethered to real life.

In essence a modern update of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd.* which also channels the devastating "fallen women" pictures of Kenji Mizoguchi, the film casts Lindsey Lohan as our Norma Desmond, a melancholic strumpet who has landed in the monied arms of Deen's violent Hollywood leading man. She is secretly in love with another, a wide-eyed newbie played by Nolan Gerard Funk.

The film is an unabashed love poem to Lohan. Her performance is mesmerising, like a glitterball hanging in an abattoir. She's every bit the ultra-charismatic Hollywood grand dame who has been forced — by dint of her turbulent personal life — to partake in a film which might not meet her current star profile. An easy film at which to administer quick critical rabbit

punches, there's more interesting decisions being made in every scene and in every shot than most new movies doing the rounds. One thing's for sure, Lohan remains big, even if the pictures got small. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Kickstarter-funded and staring a porno actor.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Imperfect on a superficial level, but positively brimming with juicy subtext.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *One of Schrader's most interesting directorial efforts.*

4

Spring in a Small Town (1948)

Directed by **FEI MU**

Starring **CUI CHAOMING, WEI WEI, SHI YU**

Released **20 JUNE**



The ethereal complexities of the love triangle have seldom been expressed in such bracing and emotionally harrowing detail as they are in Fei Mu's postwar classic, *Spring in a Small Town*, which is released into UK cinemas alongside the BFI's gigantic survey of Chinese cinema. To emphasise the essential purity of this tragic tale, characters are introduced as archetypes by on-screen subtitles, so you have The Wife (Wei Wei, in her staggering debut screen performance), The Husband (Shi Yu) and The Guest (Li Wei Li) all converging in the desolate small town of the title. Still bearing the scars of war, this tiny, depopulated burg comprises of a damaged wall which surrounds a small cluster of houses and few ugly piles of rubble. One servant character spends time attempting to haphazardly rebuild the wall by simply piling

stray bricks on top of one another. The question Mu poses: is it better to bulldoze a damaged society and start again, or is there worth in building on top of the precious ruins?

This conundrum is transposed to the film's central romance, as Wei's character becomes torn between persisting with the arduous and thankless task of tending to her tubercular husband, or engage in some clandestine canoodling with his old pal, a dashing doctor with whom she was romantically linked prior to meeting her sickly spouse. A poetic voice-over articulates the stifled feelings that the characters dare not reveal to one another, and while in lesser hands this might have unwittingly defused the coiled eroticism at the story's heart, here it adds a complex supplementary layer to proceedings. Aside from the actors and dialogue,

Mu — who died at the age of 44 and made only one more film — creates extra hits of pure emotion through silky camera movements and the melancholy manner in which he frames his conflicted characters against the unforgiving landscape. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Is this the lost Chinese classic?*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Very much so. Top-tier melodrama.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *Mu's inquisitive camera means the film is saying more than you'll hear.*

5



Frank

Directed by **LENNY ABRAHAMSON**

Starring **MICHAEL FASSBENDER, DOMHNALL GLEESON, MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL**

Released **9 MAY**

Surrealist shenanigans are what we've come to expect from Welsh gonzo journalist and screenwriter Jon Ronson (*The Men Who Stare at Goats*), but he surpasses all expectation with this charmingly off-kilter resurrection of cult TV and stand-up persona, Frank Sidebottom, who was brought to life by musician and comedian Chris Sievey for over two decades. Here Ronson — who played keys in the Frank Sidebottom band for a short period in the late '80s — alongside director Lenny Abrahamson, repurpose this mostly forgotten Brit oddball as the catalyst for misadventure in a darkly comic tale of a struggling musician's painful rite of passage.

Humming a happy tune and tweeting a merry Tweet is Jon (Domhnall Gleeson), who's long dreamed of making it big in the music industry but doesn't really have the talent to get there. When Jon lucks his way into playing a local gig with touring band The Soronprfbs — whose unpronounceable name forms one of the film's best running jokes — it feels like destiny calling. For a short time, at least. Because despite his palpable enthusiasm, we sense from the outset that Jon is out of his depth. It's not (just) that he's a terrible musician, more that Jon isn't reading from the same songsheet as the band's

mercurial and enigmatic frontman, Frank (a literally unrecognisable Michael Fassbender), who wears a giant papier mâché head which he refuses to take off — he sleeps in it, washes in it, even eats liquid meals through a tube. In fact, none of the other band members have seen Frank's real face.

With judgement clouded by his pursuit of stardom, Jon ignores the initial bad vibes, and before long he's piling into a van and unloading gear into a remote Irish cottage-cum-recording studio to lay down the band's debut long-player. What he thinks is just going to be a weekend-long jam, however, spirals (or rather stagnates) into an 18-month slog during which the band wrestle for Frank's affections. During this time Jon bonds with Frank, who opens up without ever letting the mask slip, while Jon's inclination towards watered-down yet "extremely likeable" pop songs sours his relationship with scowling theremin player Clara (Maggie Gyllenhaal), who's never less than forthcoming in her hatred.

Anyone who has ever toiled day-and-night in search of musical perfection, only to reach a point of artistic indifference, will relate to this delightfully screwy black comedy. Yet *Frank* is also a clever satire on the corruptive power of the internet, as Jon's ritual chronicling of the band's

extended recording session racks up YouTube hits for all the wrong reasons. Their internet infamy gets them noticed by the programmers of none other than SXSW, and so, somewhat reluctantly, the band hotfoots it to Austin to perform for their adoring fans.

When they arrive, the reality that going viral doesn't equate to actual popularity hits Frank hard. With the wheels threatening to come off, Abrahamson steers his film down a conventional avenue and the lingering question over Frank's true nature — is he a tortured genius, closeted freak or just a hipster with a big head? — is eventually answered, for better or worse, in a poignant closing scene that jars with the film's hitherto madcap tone. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *Michael Fassbender wearing a giant novelty head?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Acutely weird anarcho-punk mayhem.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Given the set up, the conventionally sentimental ending feels like a cop out.*

3

Jon Ronson

LWLies talks to the inquisitive Welsh journalist and non-fiction writer about how he channelled an alternative northern comic into a film about creativity and the internet.

***LWLies*: Frank is a film which felt like it was your story more than that of director Lenny Abrahamson. Is that the case?**

Ronson: What I've noticed with film, and this film in particular, is that everybody's voice gets thrown into the mix and just rattles around. It's always going to be a little discordant. Some of the really personal scenes in the film are Peter Straughan's who I co-wrote it with. The thing I really brought to it was this 'Alice Through the Looking Glass' thing. In real life, to be plucked from the suburbs and have a white rabbit dash past you and then to chose to be brave and follow it down the rabbit hole, it's just amazing. A lot of the times when Lenny would add his voice to the material, I wasn't actually there. So I don't really know how personal it was for him. It could be incredibly personal. I'd love to hear what he has to say on that.

How close was the finished film to the script you tendered?

Originally, the film was much more baroque. It was set in the '80s and there were flash forwards to today. We even had a flashback to Germany just after the war when everything was rubble. The idea was that there would be all these different stories. It would have been old Jon in his forties looking back to his twenties and hearing all these tall tales about Frank.

It's good that, in the final film, there isn't any back-story.

That's exactly what Lenny brought to it. After about draft three or four, he said, 'Look, I don't want any of that stuff. No flash forwards or flash backs. We have to learn the story exactly as Jon learnt it. It should all be shot in real time.' It's quite a melancholy film, because I think that Lenny is quite a melancholy person.



Was the character of Jon always called Jon?

Yes. Always. You know what? Jon being the kind of villain, in a very subtle way, was there from the beginning. Lots of our discussions were agonising about how aware Jon was of his own malevolence. We actually rented a disused railway station near Alton Towers and spent ages just talking. As a non-fiction writer, it's really hard to get my head around questions like that.

Frank is also a story about the internet and the practical uses of social networking.

Yeah, it's something that has been obsessing me for the last three years. It's what my next book is going to be about. So I was really, really interested in all that. The first time we thought about the internet was in a scene that was eventually cut. Jon goes onto Google and types in F and R to try and track down Frank, and you get all these revolting porno search terms that begin with F and R. When we moved the film to the present day, it's just natural to have Jon be someone who is obsessed with the internet.

When you were writing, did you have actors envisaged in the various parts?

I always thought we would get a big star. The challenge of acting under a big fake head was always going to appeal to someone. Jon, I didn't know, but I thought Domhnall Gleeson was absolutely perfect. Clara, who is played by Maggie Gyllenhaal, was actually based on Klaus Kinski. Particularly, in the documentary *My Best Fiend*.

Was Frank her Herzog?

Yes, very much so. The characters of Frank and Clara are Herzog and Kinski. Maggie said that her way of inhabiting the part was to think that she loved Frank, and that in turn was incredibly frustrating.

Has the film yet played in Frank Sidebottom's hometown, Timperley? How have Sidebottom's fans reacted to it?

There was a screening put on for Chris Sievey's family and they all loved it. There are some hardcore Sidebottom fans who might not like it. The bottom line is, this film is not about Frank Sidebottom. It's a parallel universe Frank. For me, giving him an American accent means that you're stating there and then that you're not making a Frank Sidebottom film. If we'd done a biopic and manipulated certain facts, which all biopics do, that would've pissed off certain people just as much.

Does your own musical career live on in any form?

I actually bought my son for Christmas an '80s Casio keyboard, and I do play it sometimes when nobody's around 🎹



Of Horses and Men

Directed by **BENEDIKT ERLINGSSON**

Starring **INGVAR EGGERT SIGURÐSSON, CHARLOTTE BØVING, HELGI BJÖRNSSON**

Released **13 JUNE**

A story of feuding neighbours with the emphasis on the neigh, *Of Horses and Men* is a filly's-eye-view of human folly from Icelandic writer-director Benedikt Erlingsson that's both hysterically funny and oddly moving. It's a collection of interlinked episodes which fuse to form a picture of an isolated Icelandic community comprised of eccentric valley dwellers who are united by their love of horses and divided by their pettiness, jealousies and propensity for rash, invariably asinine antics. So don't be fooled by the sober-sounding title, not least because many of the characters are constantly soused.

Of Horses and Men begins with the prissily attired Kolbeinn (Ingvar Sigurðsson) haring it through the lanes atop his immaculately-kempt, small, white steed, the horse's nimble legs as blurred as the spokes on a cartwheel — a spectacle which is observed with awe by his binocular-wielding neighbours. He's lunching with Solveig (Charlotte Bøving) and her family, a happy event that ends with humiliation when his horse is mounted by hers as he tries to ride away. It's the first of several stories that culminate in a sting, making it a

kind of equine-themed *Tales from the Crypt*.

It's also a credible, albeit askew examination of rural traditions and the characters who define and make up a community. Men are described as "ambitious" as a euphemism for their spectacular failings (one is literally blinded by his principles), and women vie for the village's 'stallion' (who's still something of an idiot) even as they are putting their husbands in the ground.

Erlingsson is best known as an actor, yet his debut shows real flair for meticulously constructed humour, vignettes which build skilfully from titters to guffaws and which deliver cracking physical punch-lines and the occasional shock. He's ably assisted by a cast who balance believability with comic assurance while never overplaying the material. The film also boasts a near-microscopic focus on horse peepers which divide each chapter, quite literally providing a reflection of events. These horses are the observers and sometimes unwitting accomplices to this series of human calamities — they and we watch helpless, aghast (and is it too much of an anthropomorphism to say that they too are amused?).

Revelling in the majesty of the horse is hardly a screen first, although the relationship between humans and horses has more commonly been explored as mawkish sideshow. Erlingsson's film has great reverence for its equine heroes, but boasts something that's lesser seen: the comic contrast between man and beast — their dignity, our chaos; their robustness, our fragility; their simplicity, our maddening complexity. It juxtaposes the community's ramshackle, booze-fuelled romps with the magnificence and dependability of these long-suffering animals. **EMMA SIMMONDS**

ANTICIPATION. *Erm, it's about man's complex relationship with his equine friends you say?*

2

ENJOYMENT. *Oh hang on, it's also hilarious!*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Finely crafted comedy, beautifully captured landscapes and genuine insight.*

4

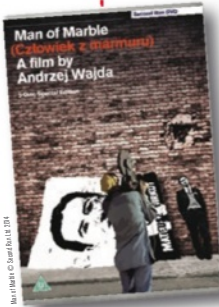
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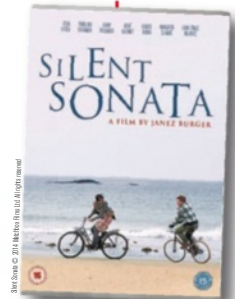


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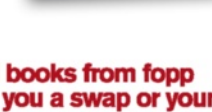
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Blue Ruin

Directed by **JEREMY SAULNIER**
 Starring **MACON BLAIR, DEVIN RATRAY, AMY HARGREAVES**
 Released **2 MAY**

We meet Dwight (Macon Blair) when he is down and out, living in his car and sporting a dirty wife-beater and a wild-man beard. The only features to distinguish him from anonymous hobo status are eyes so large they seem wrenched open in horror. These brown pools snap open as a female police officer raps on his car window, waking him from his afternoon slumber. These brown pools stand in for a verbal reaction when the officer sympathetically breaks the news that a double murderer named Will Cleland has been released from jail. These brown pools suggest emotional motivation as he buys a map of Virginia and take his battered existence on the road.

The decision by director Jeremy Saulnier to set up his premise and introduce his lead character with minimal exposition is a bold and brilliant one. A vagrant, a freed and violent ex-con and a desire for revenge are the striking and salient facts. Saulnier, also with his DoP hat on, continues to let the menace build as his hero takes a winding car trip through the

American wilderness. The camera swings around curves in the road, taking in trees and providing space in which the audience can brace themselves for conflict. We know it's going to be messy but how messy exactly? As ever the individual imagination can be trusted to take a few clues and conceive of barbaric things.

The subsequent two thirds of the film can never quite match the distinctive mood established in the early and enigmatic segments. Once the violence gets going the terrain feels — despite the outpourings of the critical hive mind — like a standard-issue, shoot-to-survive, out-of-control horror nasty.

A stand out scene comes in the form of a terrifying home-under-siege set-up that plays like a stealthier and thus more skin-crawling *Straw Dogs*. Dwight, who it turns out is a bit of an amateur at blood sports, borrows tactics from the *Home Alone* school of DIY survival. It's fitting, therefore, that a grown-up Buzz McCallister shows up to play Dwight's old-school friend, Ben (Devin Ratray), a metallur as cheerful shooting the breeze about old times as

he is about showing off his firearms collection. His contributions are a comic joy, as energetic and amusing as the rest of the film is poised and serious.

Blair excels at conveying a highly specialist form of despair as Dwight, who after a shave and outfit change shuffles around like an unhappy office stooge compelled to violence by an aberration of destiny. There is a disconnect between his original character and the rote villains (a family of revolting hicks anyone?) that reflects the marriage between originality and banality in the film as a whole.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. *A reinvention of the revenge genre, apparently.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *No it isn't, despite great sequences.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Macon Blair's eyes burn through an unconvincing plot.* **3**

Ken Loach

Jimmy's Hall is the purported swansong of unassuming Brit legend Ken Loach. He tells *LW Lies* about how he's still fighting the good fight.

Written by long-time partner Paul Laverty, *Jimmy's Hall* (released in the UK on 30 May) is the latest by Ken Loach and tells of small-scale political uprising in County Leitrim in the '30s, as the return of exiled community leader Jimmy Granton stirs descent when he decides to re-open a hall intended for dance, art, poetry and learning.

***LW Lies*: Is this a film about impossibility of a socialist utopia?**

Loach: The difficulty, not the impossibility. Maybe it's about not underestimating the people you are up against. In this case, it's religious and economic power. The realpolitik of the politicians who, like the prime minister of the time, De Valera, wooed the Church in order to gain support. They thought he was going to be very radical, so he came and met with the Church, got down on his knee and basically made a pact. A bit like Tony Blair did with Rupert Murdoch.

Do people naturally gravitate towards education when there's extreme poverty?

Absolutely. Certainly, it was the case with something like the miners' strike. There was a surge in community activity back then. People came together. It happened in wartime, too. What I think has happened now is that technology has taken over. People are atomised. They have smartphones and tablets, and that's the new brand of community engagement. That can be quite a reactionary thing. The oppressed, the poor, the dispossessed, the only strength they have is in solidarity, in the collective. If they're isolated and technology helps them to be isolated, they become weak.

Were you every involved in a community group or co-operative?

I was involved in a little amateur theatre group,



but nothing like this. They were consciously socialist and radical revolutionaries. They would've had a set of ideas about the class nature of society, the need to organise, the inevitable conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie. The hall first came out of the war of independence and the civil war. And it's during those kinds of conflicts that ideas like that came up. It was the time of Jim Larkin and James Connolly, and Connolly would've been Jimmy Granton's hero. He led the 1916 uprising. Great socialist. Great union organiser. Jimmy and his friends would have had a body of ideas. It wasn't merely a case of let's open up a hall and have a dance.

There's an intriguing portrayal of the catholic church in the film. They're stuffy, but on the road to some kind of enlightenment.

It's not monolithic. As well as the people who supported Franco in Spain and all that, you also had the liberationist theologians in Latin America who supported revolutionaries. Then you have pragmatists, like the young priest in this who says to just let them be. You'll cause

more trouble by suppressing them. The older priest, although he absolutely tows the Church's line, is intrigued by the things that he's denied himself. He has a grudging respect for someone who has the commitment of the early martyrs.

Do you think the left are too soft?

Yes, I think so. Often, I think we're too prepared to give people a second chance. The Labour party couldn't kick Blair out, despite his illegal war. They're putting up with Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, despite the fact they know they're not going to do anything significant. There will be a few changes, but nothing central. There's a reluctance to believe the Labour leadership is as bad as it is. Often the trade union leadership has led people into cul-de-sacs. The broad left is too soft. Or the soft left is too big and the hard left is too small, put another way. With the serious left, we've had huge problems with sectarianism and being in thrall to would-be charismatic leaders.

Do you feel the private and the political are mutually exclusive?

Yes, I think that's always been true. I've known a lot of people who have been committed socialists, committed organisers, and it's very hard to sustain a family. It becomes your life. And again, people like Julian Assange, who has taken a stand on freedom of information, he's facing a life in prison if they get him out of that embassy. When we were making this film, Ai Wei Wei's studio was destroyed by the Chinese government. And that was a free space, like Jimmy's hall. A place where you could meet and exchange ideas or produce something. They destroyed it.

Can you be political and not be a politician?

You amass all the baggage. And when you do, that's when you get screwed ☹



The Punk Singer

Directed by SINI ANDERSON

Starring KATHLEEN HANNA, CARRIE BROWNSTEIN, KIM GORDON

Released 23 MAY



Sini Anderson's debut documentary is a feature-length hit of punk feminist adrenaline. First there was sexist bullshit. Then there was Kathleen Hanna, who shot to relevance in 1991 as frontwoman of girl band Bikini Kill using her captivating voice and explosive femininity to challenge patriarchal nonsense wherever it reared its stupid face.

A performance artist, poet and long-term friend of Hanna's, Sini Anderson's massive achievement is her capacity to understand and capture not just the life story of her subject but the longitudinal social reasons of why she is important. "Bikini Kill had to happen or we would have starved to death culturally," says one relieved commentator, one of the droves of cultural figures and musical movers (hey, Kim Gordon from Sonic Youth!) who line up not simply to praise Hanna but to link their struggles to her.

The portrait Anderson presents of life in the grunge music scene during the '90s is one where women felt threatened by men. A news report is included from Woodstock 1999 in which, amid the chaos and violence, four rapes were alleged to have occurred. Hanna was firefighting on the frontline of a feminist war,

receiving death threats just for singing about her life and continuing nonetheless.

Now in her forties, Hanna operates as a kind of omniscient narrator commenting on her history and telling formative anecdotes in trademark valley-girl deadpan. Her talent as a lyricist was for crystallising complex, sociopolitical issues. Here she is equally piercing on personal experiences. A passion to make sense of injustice through singing, creativity and activism are covered in interviews edited together in a collage style that reflects the riot grrrl aesthetic. Anderson is true to the fast-paced spirit of her subject, creating an intoxicating momentum rendered meaningful by a melee of (sadly) still relevant feminist ideas.

Anderson backs up her articulate frontwoman with a soundtrack of Bikini Kill and Hanna's subsequent band, Le Tigre, and visually with a treasure trove of old photos and recordings. One-stage, Hanna emerges as an irresistible force of energy and conviction, whose ability to look the part is ripe for this cinematic chronicle. During the unrelenting truth-screaming era of Bikini Kill, her wardrobe was pure grunge princess in minidresses and red lipstick. In electropop trio

Le Tigre, a candied palette took over with Kathleen and bandmates Johanna and JD transforming to real-life Manga characters.

Anderson succeeds admirably in chronicling Hanna's personal story, vividly depicting the performance and art scenes she touched but the real vitality of *The Punk Singer* comes from an ideological place. Anderson, through Hanna, has provided a roadmap to escaping the suffocating limitations imposed by any form of oppression. Both ladies are wise to the simple truth that feminism is but a branch of liberalism, and both believe with infectious brilliance that liberty begins in the place where vocal power meets a punk state of mind. SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. *Harmonious reactions everywhere.*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Inspiring feminist director captures spirit of inspiring feminist singer.*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *The only words I know are "more", "more" and "more"...*

5



Pompeii

Directed by **PAUL WS ANDERSON**

Starring **KIT HARINGTON, EMILY BROWNING, KIEFER SUTHERLAND**

Released **2 MAY**

AD goes 3D in *Pompeii*, which finds director Paul WS Anderson adroitly manoeuvring away from the zombie-flick hijinks of his *Resident Evil* franchise. Anderson's last stand-alone feature was 2010's light-footed reboot of *The Three Musketeers*, which starred his muse Milla Jovovich alongside a choice Euro-trash ensemble and felt, for all its goofy charms, like a lateral move — a deft sidestep into steam-punk swashbuckler territory. By contrast, *Pompeii* gives off a slightly more elevated vibe. In terms of size, scope and spectacle, it's a step up for a filmmaker who has long since proven himself in the B-movie trenches.

Opening with a quote from Pliny the Younger overlaid on images of artfully immolated corpses, *Pompeii* is working in a more grave register than other recent sword-and-sandal epics. This attempt at gravitas is appropriate considering the fateful particulars of its story. Its tale of a muscular slave (Kit Harington) who leads an uprising against the Roman emissaries dispatched to the titular mountain town can only end in tears — and cascading rivers of streaming molten lava.

With this in mind, Anderson and his screenwriters have decided to maximize the

sense of encroaching melancholy. This is why despite its frequent and obvious allusions to the likes of *Ben-Hur* and *Gladiator*, the Oscar-winner being evoked most strongly in *Pompeii* is *Titanic*. Low-born and oafishly soulful behind cartoon-critter peepers, Harington's Milo is an orphaned serf à la Leonardo DiCaprio (the difference is that he has pectoral muscles). Meanwhile, as Cassia, *Pompeii*'s most eligible bachelorette, Emily Browning gives pretty good Kate Winslet.

The Billy Zane in this equation is Kiefer Sutherland, who, between this film and *Melancholia* would seem to be the go-to-guy for playing assholes oblivious to the impending end of days. Everything his scheming Senator Corvius says and does invites comeuppance, and he gets it twice over, in each of *Pompeii*'s two terrific climaxes. The first is a Coliseum-set set-piece where Milo squashes Corvus' henchmen. The second is the extended destruction-by-volcano of the entire town, which plays out as a highlight-reel of 21st century disaster-movie tropes.

He also does a pretty good job of substituting Toronto for Campania, which is surely the first time that the Canadian metropolis has played Italy in a movie. It helps that his Quebecois cinematographer has bathed the proceedings in enough Mediterranean glow to ward off

the darkening effects of the 3D process. In fact, *Pompeii* looks just sumptuous enough to offset its second-hand storytelling tactics, which embrace narrative and dramatic clichés like long-lost friends. And yet there's finally something likeable about a modern blockbuster that foreswears self-aware winking in the Roland Emmerich mode in favour of unblinking, misty-eyed melodrama. Even if Milo and Cassia's doomed romance never quite attains the tragic dimensions of Romeo and Juliet — or even that Decemberists concept album about the Hazards of Love — there's something slightly moving about a movie that seems to earnestly believe in it all the same. I think I have a little bit of ash in my eye, guys. **ADAM NAYMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Another action missive from Paul WS Anderson.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Rough edges aside, there's a decent romantic melodrama to be found amid the ruins.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Better than it had any right to be.*

4

Home Ents

Birds, Orphans and Fools (1969)

Directed by **JURAJ JAKUBISKO**
 Starring **MAGDALÉNA VÁŠÁRYOVÁ,**
JIRI SYKORA, MILAN BERAN
 Released **JUNE 23**
 Format **DVD**



An impish ménage à trois, two guys and a gal, flutter and squawk around a dilapidated farmhouse, dedicating their lives to carefree frolics, jovial horseplay and bodily excess. They constantly prod and needle one another, dress up in all manner of comedy garb and gab incessantly in liberationist political slogans and cod philosophical aphorisms. They are the orphans of the title, castaways of mixed heritage whose parents were killed in the war, most likely at the hands one another. Juraj Jakubisko's 1969 film, *Birds, Orphans and Fools*, is a cacophonous burlesque which eschews linear plot in favour

of a series of madcap spectacles. A sense of forward momentum is gained through the steady transformation of tone, as the film begins as bawdy farce, graduates to sledgehammer agit-prop, and climaxes as a kind of lunatic horror-melodrama.

Slovakian writer-director Jakubisko's film was variously compared to Federico Fellini, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, and it's easy to see why. Yet, the filmmaker whose work it most resembles is Nicolas Roeg, particularly down to its use of fish-eye lenses, dazzling colour effects and its way of zeroing in on the squalor of the backdrop as much as the human characters. There's a

appealing musicality to the filmmaking, though even at 70 minutes, it does sometimes feel a little over-egged and disjointed. A scene in which the trio head into the countryside and ignite a huge mound of discarded celluloid offers the most blunt encapsulation of Jakubisko's revisionist aims. It's very light on political context, with authority, bureaucracy and the military earmarked as the "fools" against whom our trio of hippy dreamers are aiming their cloistered rebellion. Formally, it's a druggy triumph, even if the characters are seldom allowed to reveal their inner lives. **DAVID JENKINS**

Violent Saturday (1955)

Directed by **RICHARD FLEISCHER**
 Starring **VICTOR MATURE, RICHARD EGAN, STEPHEN MCNALLY**
 Released **28 APRIL**
 Format **DUAL FORMAT DVD-BLU-RAY**



Aside from a marginal but fervent enclave of avid supporters, the work of Richard Fleischer was never truly appreciated during the director's lifetime (1916–2006). He's often pegged as a dependable journeyman who offered little in terms of an authorial imprint, perhaps down to the range and diversity of genres and styles he tackled, from the biblical epic (1961's *Barabbas*), suburban horror (1971's *Ten Rillington Place*) the storybook adventure (1954's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*) and speculative sci-fi (1973's *Soylent Green*). Yet, upon closer inspection, there was and is a certain hard-edged fluency and dexterity to his

filmmaking. The Masters of Cinema label have carefully plucked his 1953 masterpiece, *Violent Saturday*, from the menagerie of titles that make up his back catalogue, and transformed it into a(nother) stunningly packaged objet d'art.

Three mean sonsabitches (Lee Marvin, Stephen McNally and J Carrol Naish) roll up in the sleepy berg of Bisbee, Arizona in order to rob the local bank. Their minutely orchestrated plan involves the kidnap of Victor Mature's rueful patriarch and the forming of a getaway station on the farm of an Amish family lorded over by a pitchfork-wielding Ernest Borgnine.

Offering a cool twist on the tinpot-

heist-gone-wrong picture which sits very neatly between John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* and Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing*, Fleischer's primal howl-of-a-movie adopts a hardboiled genre template before subtly loading the text with its caustic musings on the destructive nature of man. *Violent Saturday* is a pessimistic diatribe on the impossibility of living a life that isn't dictated by some form of aggression, a tragic circumstance which cannot be corrected by adherence to those supposed tonics of polite society; family, community, religion and education. **DAVID JENKINS**

Home Ents

Alain Robbe-Grillet: Six Films (1964-1974)

Directed by **ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET**

Starring **VARIOUS**

Released **23 JUNE**

Format **DVD AND BLU-RAY**



Known largely as the writer of the “nouveau roman” upon which Alain Resnais based *Last Year At Marienbad*, writer, director and thinker Alain Robbe-Grillet went on to become one of Europe’s key exponents of artfully-inclined screen erotica. The BFI are celebrating his life and work by releasing his first six directorial features in a plush Blu-ray box set, including everything from 1964’s *The Immortal One* through to 1974’s gloriously titled *Successive Slidings of Pleasure*.

The inarguable highlight of the set is deconstructionist classic, *Trans-Europ Express*,

from 1967, in which Robbe-Grillet and his wife Catherine postulate on the narrative of a surreal spy movie from the confines of cosy train compartment. Their words and ideas are then simultaneously visualised via a parallel story starring Jean-Louis Tritignant. Logic is thrown out in favour of adopting a wild, brainstorm structure, with the film mutating from dope-smuggling noir to kinky S&M fantasia and back again.

Robbe-Grillet dials back the naked flesh for Kafkaesque runaround, *The Man Who Lies*, and then dials it right back up again for its trio

of successors. The interesting *Eden and After* is a freeform diptych which offers an obscure commentary on the aftermath and iconography of the ’68 student uprising. As if to flaunt the randomness of its design, *N Rolls the Dice* offers an unnecessary remix (or anagram) of *Eden and After*, with order dictated solely by the gods of chance. *Successive Slidings...* is an intriguing if tiresome art-porn hybrid which, via staccato editing and discordant sound design, combines the primordial ooze of a murder mystery plot with imagery of bare flesh, cracked eggs, body paint and knife wounds. **DAVID JENKINS**

The King and the Mockingbird (1980)

Directed by **PAUL GRIMMAULT**

Starring **JEAN MARTIN, PASCAL MAZZOTTI, RAYMOND BUSSIÈRES**

Released **28 APRIL**

Format **DVD AND BLU-RAY**



Are you tired of seeing the term “lost classic” bandied around like some meaningless platitude, linked to anything and everything that didn’t place in the top 250 of the recent *Sight & Sound* enormo-poll? Well, we are too. But we make no apologies for wheeling it out in recognition of Paul Grimault’s astounding 1980 feature, *The King and the Mockingbird*, a film which no less than Hayao Miyazaki considers one of the vertigo-inducing pinnacles of the animated form.

Set in the kingdom of Takicardia, which, geographically, exists as fully on vertical as it does on horizontal plains, the film follows a flouncing, tyrannical monarch named Charles V + III = VIII +

VIII = XVI who appears to be an amalgam of Henry VIII, Hitler and the evil Queen from *Snow White*. He rules the land with a violent autonomy, and the lives of his loyal subjects balance on the hair-trigger of his day-to-day cheeriness. He is deeply in love with a young Shepherdess whose portrait hangs in his cloisters. One night, her image comes to life and she escapes from the frame along with a young paramour, a chimney sweep who promises to make sure she never falls into the clutches of the evil king.

Based upon the final screenplay by noted French wordsmith Jacques Prévert, who lent political intrigue and bon mots by the

hundredweight to classics such as Jean Renoir’s *La Crime de Monsieur Lang* and Marcel Carné’s *Les Enfants du Paradis*, the film almost feels like a Europhile precursor to the films of Studio Ghibli. Its truly eccentric design scheme pegs it as an outlier, even though there’s visible connective tissue to both Disney’s baroque fairy tales and the structuralist experiments and clean lines of Eastern European animators such as Walerian Borowczyk. But every frame of this film positively bursts with extended man-hours, intense discussions and a sense of perfectionism which feels like a total anachronism in the digital age. **DAVID JENKINS**

Reykjavik Shorts & Docs Festival



FEATURE

The cold north wind blows some icy nuggets and cold hard truths through the streets of the Icelandic capital as the annual Reykjavik Shorts & Docs gears up for its 12th edition and *LWLies* hunkers down for a week of long nights and short films in the land of ice and fire™. Despite experiencing a relative lull in homegrown feature output over recent years, Iceland is currently in possession of big-budget cinema's golden ticket, with such mammoth productions as *Noah*, *Oblivion* and *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* utilising its brawny landscape as grand movie sets. There are also rumours concerning the new *Star Wars* film everywhere. All this plus Reykjavik's extravagantly detailed *Big Lebowski*-themed bar and the curious case of the Ray Liotta Café — which we could never quite find — mean that the country remains alive (or at least restlessly dormant) with cinema.

The festival centres around the Bió Paradís, a charismatic independent cinema which seems to have fallen straight from movie heaven, complete with a well stocked fridge (*hic*), an astonishing sound system and kooky hand-tooled posters for *Harold and Maude* and *Solaris* spread across its walls. It is here the festivities commence with Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's Nick Cave documentary

20,000 Days on Earth. Taking place over a stylised, fictionalised and demythologised 24 hours in the singer's life, the film crackles with energy, sly wit and sulphurous brimstone as the William Faulkner of Wangaratta expounds on the means and ends — and personal worth — of creativity. It's a disarming portrait: he laughs, he mucks about, he eats pizza. Who knew? But the cold, dark fires are never far away, as an especially caustic live reading of 'Jubilee Street' to a stunned Sydney audience proves all too well.

Winkles duly picked, it's on to another musical treat with John Grierson's 1929 documentary *Drifters*, which charts the voyage of a herring trawler from Scotland down to the fish markets of East Anglia. It is, naturally enough, accompanied by a live score from Manchester's finest human beatbox/vocal sculptor, Jason Singh. This makes no sense at all on paper, but in practice it is an astonishing and mesmeric experience, with Singh's keening mortal beats synching perfectly with Grierson's rhythmic editing and harsh images of proletariat strife — think *Battleship Potemkin* meets The Prodigy in a cavernous Manc'larynx and you're well on your way.

The local talent receives its moment in the midnight sun with a programme of Icelandic

shorts, which are — as is so often the case — a mixed, and a rather violent bag indeed. Rape, torture and cannibalism are all on the menu in various forms, with the pick of this particularly grisly bunch being Baldur Hólmgeirsson's *Gláma*, a cheerfully brazen and technically accomplished culinary retread of *The Shining* by way of *The League of Gentlemen*. Streets ahead though, and a clear audience favourite, is the strikingly-named Vera Wonder Sölvadóttir's mini-epic road movie *In Search of Livingstone*, which hitches a ride with two hipster-doofuses as they drive from town to town hunting down a pack of smokes during an island-wide tobacco shortage caused by a strike at the docks. The mood is all Wim Wenders and the result is all charm in a film that embraces both Iceland's sweeping landscape and the mischievous gallows humour of its inhabitants.

Strikes — this time by Keflavík Airport baggage handlers — schedule conflicts and some generous 'liquid hospitality' meant that we missed out on all of the short docs section save for *Herd in Iceland*, a real-life modern western that follows the yearly migration of Iceland's famous ponies down from the mountains. All big skies and wide angles, it's also an intimate and tender reminder that the old ways need not be abandoned 🐾

South By Southwest



Each year music geeks, Silicon Valley hipsters and film school dropouts swarm to Austin, Texas, for the new media cereal variety pack that is South By Southwest Festival. Split into three main strands — Music, Interactive and Film — SXSW is a hive of cross-platform activity that prides itself on being the place to discover The Next Big Thing. *LW Lies* made the trip with the primary objective of pinning down *Boyhood* director Richard Linklater in his adopted hometown. With our mission completed and an ungodly amount of BBQ ribs consumed, we had just enough room left to sample the diverse array of talent on offer across the festival's various film sidebars.

Aside from *Boyhood*, our favourite film at this year's SXSW by some stretch was Gruff Rhys' dazzling Midwestern odyssey, *American Interior*. You can read more on that film on page 66. Elsewhere, the festival got off to a flyer with *The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz*. If that title doesn't mean anything to you, here's the gist: director Brian Knappenberger trawls through hours of archive footage and talking heads interviews to construct an affectionate, extensive portrait of Reddit co-founder and key RSS and Creative Commons developer Aaron Swartz, who committed suicide in January 2013 following a long and traumatic

lawsuit filed against him by the US government.

A radical thinker and activist, Swartz was one of the leading lights of the anti-SOPA movement, and it was ultimately his political streak that put him on the federal blacklist. Knappenberger's film paints him as both a pioneer of the digital age and a victim of a corrupt system. As easy as it is to accuse the film of hagiography, it's hard to ignore the stacks of evidence that positions Swartz as one of the good guys.

One of the film's most fascinating insights concerns Swartz's personal motives, which even those closest to him often found hard to identify. Swartz wasn't interested in the fame and wealth that came with his early entrepreneurial conquests; instead he dedicated himself to exposing the institutionalised corruption he felt had become endemic within the various organisations and governmental departments guilty of restricting and monetising supposedly public data. His methods were undoubtedly controversial, but Swartz was a Robin Hood for digital natives, and as such his story deserves to be told.

Equally impassioned is first-time director Charlie Lyne's contemplative teen film essay *Beyond Clueless* — a must-see for anyone who's ever craved a meaningful critical dissection of the humble high school movie. Lyne watched 300 movies over a one-year

period and cherry-picked clips from around 220 different titles, before compiling them into a single, sprawling homage to his favourite genre. If it sounds a bit gimmicky, you'll be swayed by Lyne's sincere and studious approach. Clearly, he's done his homework, and his obsession with a world he has only ever experienced through the prism of cinema is infectious.

His passion apparently rubbed off on British indie duo Summer Camp, whose original score provides a refreshingly moody change of pace from their typically exuberant brand of effervescent beach pop, and *The Craft's* Fairuza Balk, whose rhythmically-paced, husky voiceover, gives the film a hypnotic quality that evokes the formalistic tone of a David Attenborough documentary.

Separating his film into chapters, Lyne looks at various aspects of the genre, covering everything from canteen food chains to corridor politics. This episodic structure works well for the most part — a thorough analysis of the homoerotic undertones in 2004's *EuroTrip* is inspired stuff — although the point is rather laboured in some segments, and there are even moments when it feels like we're being fed condensed plot synopses. For all its flaws, however, *Beyond Clueless* is an impressive first film, and it's testament to the programmers of SXSW Film that British productions of this ilk are championed here 🍷

On The Right Track

DIRECTED BY
Lee Philips

STARRING
Gary Coleman, Maureen Stapleton, Norman Fell, Jami Gertz

TRAILERS
Love Among the Lepers, Spandau Ballet: The Movie, Corner Pocket.

CHERRYPICK
“Gamblers die of rabies of the soul...”

TAGLINE

‘Meet the World’s Richest Orphan!’

(1981)



FEATURE

Bavarian loonbucket Werner Herzog’s crack’d anti-coming-of-age story *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* is a sorrowful, mysterious film about acceptance and identity set against the prosperous bustle of 19th century Nuremberg. Denied the sweet, gummy freedoms and character building blocks of childhood by virtue of having been stuffed — forsaken and toyless — down a coal cellar for his first 16 years, Kaspar emerges into a world that is simply beyond his Deutsche ken. Vexed and perturbed by dreams of distant horses and buffeted by alien crosswinds, this runty little goofball is a boggle-eyed innocent born unto an unimagined world of harm, enmity and death... the lucky, lucky bastard.

For Kaspar’s own sawn-off story is a walk in das p rk when compared with the starless vortex of estrangement, turmoil and howling abasement that masquerades as daily life for little Lester Lumpsmith (Gary Coleman) in 1981’s *On the Right Track*. A tiny magic shoeshine-boy who lives in a locker in Chicago’s Union Station, Lester is assailed on every side by the Mob, the Mayor, Child Welfare Services, unduly amorous bag ladies, his own crippling solipsism and those interfering bastards from the Better Business Bureau.


He is also — via orphic visions that appear to him through a noxious haze of repressed memories and shoe-polish vapours — able to pick surefire winners at the racetrack. Add to this an intimate working knowledge of transit station life, a truly entrepreneurial spirit and a despoilt childhood and it becomes clear that Lester is ultimately destined for one of two vocations — to pimp or be pimped. Yes, Lester is a cherry ripe to be plucked. And his fruit hangs low indeed.

The whereabouts of Lester’s parents are never adequately explained, but his precocious arsenal of brassy quips concerning artificial insemination, rape, matricide, atomic testing, necrophilia

and beat-poetry sketch a fairly alarming portrait of his early days. Whatever his particulars, Lester has been righteously abandoned to dine on a daily gruel of hard cheese, knuckle-buttie sandwiches and raw-deal sushi before climbing back into his tiny tin man-cave — a combination-lock tomb from which an unmoved world could not care less whether he emerged each morning alive and/or dead. Call him Schr dinger’s hepcat, and weep.

But do not pity. Because although there has been little to so far differentiate *On the Right Track* from Scorsese’s funicular foundingling misfire *Hugo*, or Tom Hanks’ existential Hallmark card *The Terminal*, the true extent of Lester’s holy foolishness has yet to be revealed. When his dreams of improving Chicago with “laser-beams to dispose of garbage, and over-lapping soundwaves to combat air-pollution” prove ineffectual, the cherubic Lester is resolved to save his beloved city the only way he knows how — by shaking down the Chi-town Mafia with an escalating series of cynical horseracing bets. Thus, a stateless black voodoo child is the spark that sets the city aflame with avarice, jealousy, green-eyed recklessness and civic dissolution, and the film is revealed to be an unhallowed crossbreed of *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and *The Shining* (set in a locker).

So what now for Lester? Having long outgrown his locker — figuratively, at least — he must find other world’s to conquer, more people to annoy and fouler jokes to tell. Blinking into the first, harsh, phosphorescent rays of his adolescence, he has escaped one grim fate, yes. But when, in the film’s closing shot, he at last climbs the steps of Union Station in the arms of his new (white) adoptive parents — a bent cop and pinball machine repairwoman who moonlights as a shady nightclub chanteuse — it is all too clear that Lester’s problems have only just begun 🎰



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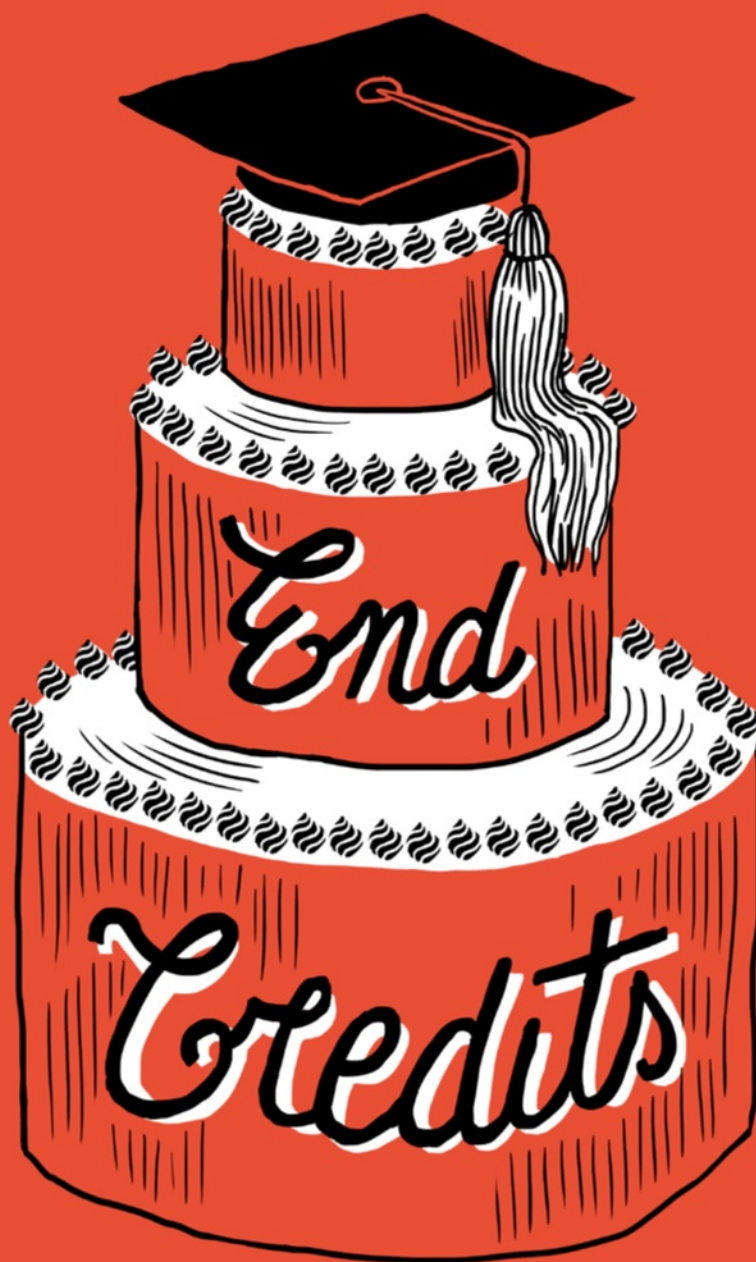
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LWLies:

What do you love about movies?

Richard Linklater:

That's such a big question.
I think fundamentally what I
love about movies is the parallel
reality of them. They're a more
selective, more attuned and more
neatly edited version of life
itself. It's improved life.
I don't know, man, you put a guy
on the spot like this... It's
just life. That's all I can say.

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